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THE FLETCHER SCHOOL OF LAW AND DIPLOMACY

CRISIS MANAGEMENT:

UNITED STATES REFLAGGING OF KUWAITI TANKERS (1987-1988)

POLITICS 217 FALL 1990

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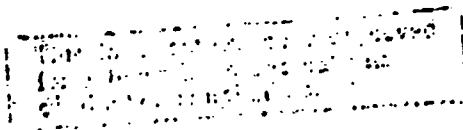
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## I. PREFACE

My interest in U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf began in 1981 during my first deployment onboard USS DAVID R. RAY DD-971. Detached from the USS KITTY HAWK CV-63 carrier battle group (CVBG), DAVID R. RAY was assigned to temporarily augment Commander Middle East Force (COMIDEASTFOR) in June. We looked upon this assignment as a chance to relax (somewhat) from the high tempo of operations of the CVBG in the North Arabian Sea.

Keeping an eye on the Iran-Iraq war, we monitored the progress of the sporadic air combat via a link with AWACS flying cover over Saudi Arabia. I had occasion one afternoon in the Combat Information Center (CIC) to speculate with the watch officer on an unusual air formation flying from the west into Iraq. The next morning we learned that Israel had bombed the Iraqi nuclear power plant. This was my first realization that the seemingly placid Persian Gulf waters could be a surprising and dangerous place from many directions and not merely between declared belligerents.

In September 1987, I returned to the Gulf as Combat Systems Officer in the USS THACH FFG-43. USS THACH was assigned to COMIDEASTFOR as one of the warships designated to carry out the mission of escorting U.S. flagged shipping.

including reflagged Kuwaiti tankers. USS THACH was commander in six EARNEST WILL convoy escort missions (counting as one a completed round trip from Fujayrah or Khor Fakkan through the Strait of Hormuz and up to Kuwaiti territorial waters and back out). This included accompanying the BRIDGETON out of the Gulf after completion of repairs for the mine damage suffered in July 1987 on the first U.S. escort of reflagged tankers mission. This particular EARNEST WILL convoy (comprised of eight huge Kuwaiti reflagged vessels) had the distinction of being the largest, in tonnage, since WWII.

Additionally, USS THACH functioned frequently as northern Anti-Air Warfare (AAW) picket or Commander monitoring air activity of the belligerents during a very busy phase of the Iran-Iraq war. This assignment also involved USS THACH in the destruction of eight mines, and two whaler-type and one boghammer small boats used by Iranian Revolutionary Guard Council (IRGC) forces. On October 19, USS THACH participated in Operation NIMBLE ARCHER - the destruction of the Rashadat oil platforms, which had been used by Iranian forces to target neutral shipping. Finally, after more than three months of intensive operations in the Persian Gulf, a period of relative calm prevailed and the Thach left for home in January 1988.

I was able to pursue my interest in U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf in conversations with two individuals that I had previously served as Executive Assistant and Aide: RADM W.A. Cockell USN (retired), who served as Deputy National Security Advisor for Political Military Affairs during this period; and RADM R. Guy Zeller USN, the Battle Group Commander on 16 April 1988 for Operation PRAYING MANTIS, which resulted in significant losses to the Iranian Navy. I subsequently served as Combat Systems Officer in USS VINCENTNES CG-49 where I worked directly for CAPT Will Rogers USN and served with most of the individuals who had a part in the tragic shootdown of Iran Air 655 on 3 July 1988.

While at the Fletcher School, I have continued my education on the Persian Gulf crisis. Through Professor Keith Hight, I have kept abreast of the Iran v. United States case resulting from the shootdown of Iran Air 655. Now under submission before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), I have prepared recommendations for Counsel in putting together the U.S. Memorial. During USS VINCENTNES' deployment this past summer in the North Arabian Sea, I decided I would write my MA thesis at The Fletcher School on U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf. Professor Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr.'s seminar on Crisis Management has provided the research opportunity and framework for this paper. The primary source materials come from U.S.

government documents and Congressional hearings, which are available at Wessell Library. Additionally, I had the opportunity to travel to the Naval War College in Newport and interview RADM Joseph C. Strasser, USN, President and a Fletcher alumnus, who served as Executive Assistant to ADM William J. Crowe, Chairman of the JCS during the Persian Gulf crisis.

As a final prefatory note, I must observe that my close association with U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf is destined to continue with my departure from The Fletcher School. In late September 1990, I received orders as prospective Executive Officer onboard USS PRINCETON CG-59. As one of the U.S. Navy's newest and most capable Aegis cruisers, USS PRINCETON was on station providing air and surface protection for U.S. minesweeping forces offshore of Kuwait when she was damaged by a mine on February 18, 1991.

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### III. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the crisis for U.S. foreign policy in the Persian Gulf during the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers in 1987 and 1988. The lenses of Crisis Management, through both theory and case study, will be used. The reflagging issue contained the conditions which define a crisis: non-routine decision-making at the highest levels of government, a change in the international environment which created a threat to core values of the nation, a number of tactical and strategic surprises, the perception that time for decision was finite during phases of the crisis, and a high probability of escalation to military hostilities.

The crisis in the Persian Gulf over reflagging was unusual in that it lasted over a year and a half, through various phases of escalation and deescalation. It is for this reason and because vital national interests were affected, that ample research material is available, despite the crisis having occurred recently. It continues to be of interest today, as the study in the evolution of U.S. foreign policy in a region of the world whose stability is of great importance.

The policy of reflagging Kuwaiti tankers almost ended before it began with the mistaken Iraqi attack on the USS



STARK. The tragic loss of American lives and severe damage to a U.S. warship in the Gulf brought the Reagan administration policy into question. Public outcry and Congressional criticism, including attempts to halt and overturn reflagging, resulted from this crisis precipitant.

One of the criticisms of reflagging was that it was a hastily and ill-conceived policy. A review of the background to the crisis reveals that U.S. policy emphasizing stability and balance in the region was of long-standing. A survey of vital U.S. national interests; strategic, political, and economic, shows that the United States continued to have an enormous stake in the outcome of the Iran-Iraq War, and its reverberations throughout the Gulf.

The role of the decision-making and the decisional unit is shown by looking at the decision to reflag Kuwaiti tankers. Theory of crisis management is used to go beyond the case study to see underlying lessons and recurring patterns. A model is used to illustrate the reflagging crisis schematically.

The use of military force to carry out the reflagging policy is seen as central to the crisis. Naval forces provided the flexibility and capabilities necessary to adapt during the crisis and achieve U.S. political goals. The

crisis was terminated in a manner completely satisfactory to the United States due to the successful employment of force.

The maintenance of escalation dominance allowed the United States to employ force to achieve its political goals in the Persian Gulf. Iran was frustrated in its objective to destabilize and intimidate the Gulf states, despite some surprising moves to circumvent the U.S. control of escalation. The firmness and consistency of U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf meant the crisis ultimately deescalated under favorable conditions.

Finally, the paper will offer an evaluation of U.S. management of the crisis over reflagging Kuwaiti tankers. Careful and consistent decision-making, controlled use of proportional force, and escalation and deescalation as required, helped resolve the Persian Gulf crisis in accordance with United States foreign policy goals. The successful coalition war against Iraq in 1990-91 would have been much more difficult without the resolve demonstrated by the United States in settling the earlier Persian Gulf crisis.

A chronology of the reflagging crisis is included in Table 6.

#### IV. Crisis Precipitant

The nighttime calm and routine boredom of patrol in the Persian Gulf was shattered forever on May 17, 1987 when USS STARK (FFG 31) was hit by two Exocet missiles fired by an Iraqi F-1 Mirage aircraft. Despite heroic damage control efforts which succeeded in keeping the ship afloat and putting out the fires, thirty-seven sailors were killed in the attack. President Reagan placed the tragedy in a wider context in his statement the next day:

This event underscores once more the seriousness of the Iran-Iraq war, not only to the countries directly involved but to others. It shows how easily it escalates, and it underlines once more the seriousness of the tensions that exist in the Middle East and the importance of trying to do something about them....This tragic incident underscores the need to bring the Iran-Iraq war to the promptest possible end. We and the rest of the international community must redouble our diplomatic efforts to hasten the settlement that will preserve both the sovereignty and territorial integrity for both Iran and Iraq. At the same time, we remain deeply committed to supporting the self-defense of our friends in the gulf and to ensuring the free flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz.

Despite the forthcoming apology from the government of Iraq and the evaluation that the attack had been a mistake, this

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George F. Schultz, "Secretary's Letters to the Congress," Department of State Bulletin, July 1987, p. 61.

Ronald Reagan, "President's Statement, May 18, 1987," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 87, No. 2124, July 1987, p. 58.

accident was a crisis precipitant for the Reagan administration's Gulf policy. As a result of the attack on USS STARK, intense Congressional scrutiny and debate became focused on U.S. foreign policy in the Persian Gulf and, particularly, on the administration's decision to reflag Kuwaiti oil tankers.

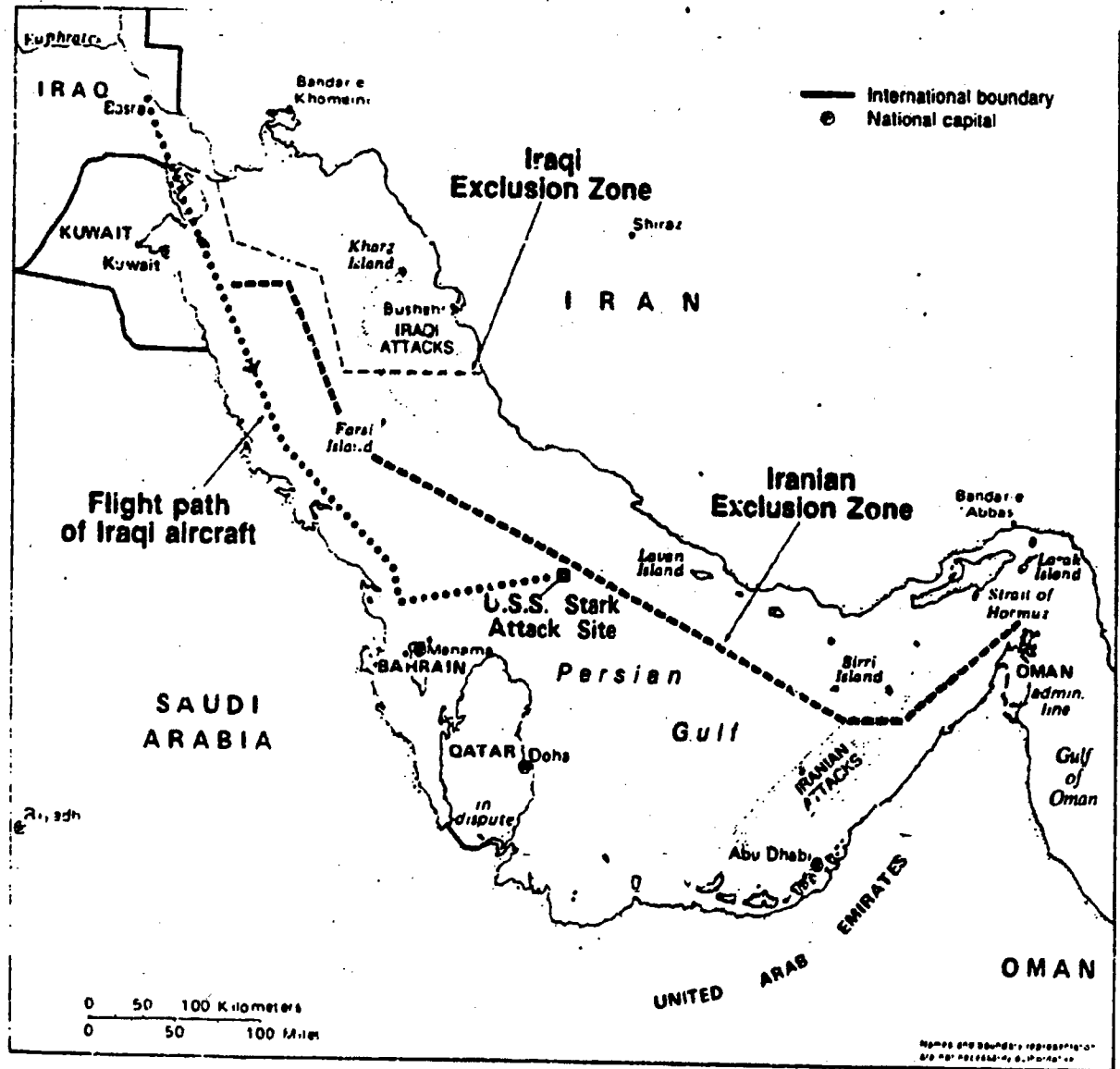
The actual decision to reflag eleven Kuwaiti oil tankers had been made some months prior to the USS STARK incident. Although the policy was briefed to committees in both houses of Congress, at both closed and open sessions in March and April, it elicited little controversy.<sup>3</sup> The attack on the USS STARK and each subsequent escalation in the ongoing Persian Gulf crisis brought renewed Congressional criticism and attempts to reverse the policy of reflagging Kuwaiti vessels. In retrospect, the reflagging of the tankers has been seen as a necessary, correct and ultimately successful policy.

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<sup>3</sup>Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon (New York: Warner Books, 1990), pp. 399-400.

TABLE 1

PERSIAN GULF MAP: THE ATTACK ON THE USS STARK



SOURCE: U.S. Dept. of State, "U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf." Special Report No. 166, July 1987, p. 4.

## V. Background to the Crisis

To understand the decision by the Reagan administration to undertake the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers, it is necessary to review previous policy in the Persian Gulf. Despite criticism to the contrary, U.S. actions in the Gulf were in support of a long-term strategy which supported vital national interests. The roots of the policy date as early as the first postwar confrontation between the U.S. and the USSR.

The United States achieved success in its goal to bring about a withdrawal of Soviet forces from northern Iran in 1946. This early Cold War experience focused policy planners' attention on the Persian Gulf region as a likely arena for future conflict with the Soviets outside of Europe. Subsequent U.S. policy toward the Persian Gulf can be seen through the lenses of containment in a bipolar world with a special emphasis on ensuring the flow of oil to the West.

The Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957 actively sought to counter Soviet gains in the region by providing aid, including security assistance to governments desiring to

Gary Sick, "The United States and the Persian Gulf," in *The Gulf War*, eds. Hanns W. Maull and Otto Pick (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 122.

oppose communism. Accordingly, the doctrine proposed providing:

such assistance and cooperation to include the employment of the armed forces of the United States to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism.

In addition to this assistance, the United States has maintained a naval presence in the Gulf since the formation of the Middle East Force (MIDEASTFOR) in 1949. With the withdrawal of the British from east of Suez in 1971, this presence has been a vital symbol of our continuing interest and commitment.

The American experience in Vietnam led to the formulation of the Nixon Doctrine in 1969. The United States pulled back from a previous willingness to "bear any burden" and announced that henceforth greater emphasis would be placed on regional allies protecting themselves directly. The result in the Persian Gulf was the development of the "Twin Pillars" policy by which the U.S. hoped to achieve

Jed C. Snyder, Defending the Fringe: NATO, the Mediterranean, and the Persian Gulf. (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1987), p. 85.

U.S. Dept. of Defense, Report to the Congress on Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf, (Washington: 15 June 1987), p. 1. Subsequently referred to as The Weinberger Report.

regional stability through the military development of Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The collapse of the Shah's regime and its replacement by a revolutionary fundamentalist government in Iran cast U.S. policy in the Gulf adrift. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and fear of Soviet expansion into the Persian Gulf caused a radical reappraisal of U.S.-Soviet relations and led to the enunciation of the Carter Doctrine. In his State of the Union Address of 23 January 1980, President Carter warned:

Any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

This led to the creation of a rapid joint task force (RJTF) with the mission of both containing Soviet expansionism and assisting moderate Gulf Arab regimes to maintain internal stability through military sales and the deployment of U.S. forces in time of crisis.

The Reagan administration inherited the Carter

Ibid.

Sick, p. 120.

Lenore G. Martin, The Unstable Gulf: Threats from Within. (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1984), p. 127.



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Doctrine and proceeded to provide additional forces and the command structure necessary to fulfill the mission by creating in 1983 the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). By the mid 1980's, CENTCOM provided the U.S. with a viable option to meet the stated goals of the policy.<sup>16</sup> At this point, it was becoming clear that, in addition to the threat posed to U.S. interests by the Soviets, the Iran-Iraq war had dangerous potential to spill over into a widened conflict threatening regional stability and the supply of oil.

In September 1980, Iraq launched its offensive into territory disputed with Iran. In 1982 the Iranian counter-offensive pushed out the enemy and advanced into Iraq. In 1984, Iraq initiated the so-called "Tanker War" by attacking ships carrying Iranian oil. Unable to break the deadlock on land and facing superior Iranian numbers, Iraq sought to cut off Iran's ability to fund <sup>the</sup> ~~their~~ war effort by curtailing oil revenues. Iran's response was to attack the ships that called at ports of non-belligerent moderate Gulf states who supported Iraq financially. Earlier, Iraq had been forced by Iranian dominance in the Gulf to develop an alternative pipeline method for exporting oil.

The official position of the United States in this

Maxwell Orme Johnson, "Rapid Deployment and the Regional Military Challenge: The Persian Gulf Equation," in US Strategic Interests in the Gulf Region, ed. William J. Olson (Englewood, Colo.: Westview Press, 1987), p. 147.

conflict was one of neutrality while seeking an end to the hostilities and restoring pre-war boundaries. While the U.S. was neutral it appeared to tilt toward Iraq with the protraction of the war. The United States saw greater threats against stability in the Persian Gulf if Iran were to maintain its advantage, achieve hegemony, and spread Islamic fundamentalism in the region. U.S.-Iranian diplomatic relations were virtually non-existent as a result of the seizure of hostages from the U.S. embassy in Tehran and the subsequent failed rescue attempt. The U.S. public's adverse reaction to the Reagan administration's covert attempt to influence the release of American hostages in Lebanon by delivering weapons to Iran further characterized the relationship as one of mutual suspicion and hostility.

In contrast, the U.S. support for UN Resolutions 514 and 532 in 1962 calling for a ceasefire, withdrawal to internationally recognized boundaries, and a peaceful resolution of the conflict coincided with Iraqi goals and was seen as a "tilt" toward Iraq. In 1984, the United States stepped up its efforts to end the war by encouraging the cut-off of arms to either belligerent who refused to

Magid Khadduri, The Gulf War: The Origins and Implications of the Iraq-Iran Conflict. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 157.

accept the UN resolutions, namely Iran."

The United States also supported a UN Security Council resolution to protect neutral shipping and began a policy of escorting U.S. Military Sealift Command (MSC) shipping. Meanwhile, U.S. credibility in the region with members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was being trampled by several developments: the Congressional prohibition of sales of F-15's and Stinger missiles to Saudi Arabia and Stingers for Kuwait in 1985 and 1986 and the arms-for-hostages revelations. The Gulf Cooperation Council consisted of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman; the same moderate Gulf states which U.S. policy sought to stabilize.

Disturbing trends began to emerge in the war by late 1986. Although only less than one percent of total shipping in the Persian Gulf was attacked, the numbers nevertheless were climbing rapidly, more than doubling from 1985 to 1986. Iran obtained possession and operationally tested

Neumann, Robert G., Shireen T. Hunter, and Frederick Axelgard. Revitalizing U.S. Leadership in the Middle East. (Washington D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1988), p. 25.

Erik R. Peterson, The Gulf Cooperation Council: Search for Unity in a Dynamic Region. (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1988), p. 193.

Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Michael H. Armacost. "Statement." U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf, Hearings (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 16 June 1987), pp. 230-

the Chinese-built Silkworm antiship missile with a capability of reaching across the Straits of Hormuz equipped with a warhead large enough to sink a tanker.<sup>15</sup> Iran began in September to focus its shipping attacks on Kuwaiti flagged vessels. This marked the expansion to the Gulf waters of Iran's attempts to intimidate Kuwait and spread its fundamentalist revolution, which earlier had been characterized by terrorist attacks; including one on the U.S. embassy in Kuwait in 1983 and an attempted assassination of the Amir in 1984.<sup>16</sup>

Iran's goals were to stop Kuwait from financially assisting Iraq and brandish its successful attacks on Kuwaiti shipping as leverage with the other oil exporting countries of the GCC. Kuwaiti and GCC financial support for Iraq were an act of political realism in attempting to curb the Iranian quest for hegemony in the Gulf and subsequent spread of its fundamentalism which threatened the stability of their regimes. Iraq was seen as the only country in the Gulf which could militarily halt Iran.

231.

Ibid., p. 231.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 232.

The Reagan administration sought ways to send signals to Iran and moderate its behavior; and also to forestall Soviet gains within the region. In January 1987, faced with Iran's continuing shipping attacks, harsh anti-U.S. statements, and an offensive against Basra, the U.S. ordered MIDEASTFOR ships to the vicinity of Kuwait, which was host for the Islamic Conference.<sup>15</sup> On January 23, President Reagan issued a statement directly calling upon Iran to seek a negotiated solution, condemned its seizure of Iraqi territory, and reaffirmed U.S. determination to ensure the free flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz. He vowed to support the defensive efforts of "our friends in the Gulf."

A month later, on 25 February 1987, President Reagan again expressed U.S. concern over the destabilizing effects to the Gulf of the ongoing Iran-Iraq war. He regretted Iran's unresponsiveness to "reason and restraint" and its continued attempts to undermine the Gulf states.<sup>16</sup> The President emphasized that U.S. strategic interests were at stake and mentioned the deployment of naval forces signaling U.S. commitment.

The Weinberger Report, p. 10.

Ronald Reagan, "Statement", Department of State Special Report No. 165, p. 8.

Ibid.

Ibid.

In the face of Iran's intransigence, the administration pursued a two-track policy to end the war. Diplomatic initiatives sought to bring about a ceasefire and cut off Iran's arms supplies. The U.S. proposed resolutions at the United Nations for ceasefire and withdrawal, which would have included enforcement provisions for mandatory sanctions against Iran. The U.S. supported similar declarations on the part of the Arab League and the GCC. With varying degrees of success, the administration also pursued Operation Staunch, a diplomatic attempt to cut off arms supplies to Iran.

## VI. U.S. Vital National Interests in the Persian Gulf

The attack on the USS STARK brought forth the crisis elements of surprise and the risk of military confrontation. The Kuwaiti request to reflag some of its vessels with the United States and others with the Soviet Union gave decision-makers a sense of finite time often found in a crisis situation. That the crisis affects vital national interests, thus requiring the attention of decision-makers at the highest levels, is the sine qua non of crisis management. U.S. vital national interests in the Persian Gulf were longstanding and evident from previous policies.

### Strategic Interests

The overwhelming dependence of the economies of the United States, its allies in western Europe and Japan, as well as developing countries on a steady supply of reasonably priced oil makes the Persian Gulf an area of vital importance. - For this reason, it is essential to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining significant influence or control of that region. Since the USSR was self-sufficient in oil production, any moves to increase its presence and visibility in the Gulf were viewed as a direct

threat to Western access.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and continuing large scale involvement enhanced fears of such gains. The absence of a significant military regional power made the Gulf ripe for Soviet interference.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the 1980's, the Soviet Union used the opening created by the Iran-Iraq war to advance its regional interests. Diplomatic relations were established for the first time with Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 1985.<sup>34</sup> The longstanding relationship with Kuwait was bolstered and overtures were made to Saudi Arabia in the face of U.S. Congressional refusal to sell that country Stingers.<sup>35</sup>

The Soviet Union's advances in the Gulf region were seen, as in a zero-sum game, as coming at the expense of the United States. The Soviets sought to portray the U.S. as an unreliable partner for Gulf states in the wake of the Iran-Contra affair and for a policy of spreading militarism in the Gulf, after the STARK attack.<sup>36</sup> For their part, the

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Weinberger, p. 389.

The Weinberger Report, p. 3.

Carol R. Salvetz, The Soviet Union and the Gulf in the 1980's. (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1989), pp. 77-90.

Ibid.

Jeffrey Schloesser, "U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf," Department of State Special Report No. 166, July 1987, p. 5.



Soviets sought to maintain a delicate balancing act. While continuing to serve as Iraq's primary arms supplier, the USSR also attempted to achieve better relations with Iran by refusing to support U.S. efforts in the United Nations to ban arms sales to Iran as long as it refused to accept the resolutions calling for a ceasefire."

The U.S. recognized the importance of Iran in achieving a regional balance despite objecting to Iran's goal of excluding the superpowers from the Gulf and spreading its fundamentalist revolution throughout the region. In the words of President Reagan, "The United States recognizes the Iranian Revolution as a fact of history." The United States and Iran had common interests in opposing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and in the integrity of Iran's borders with the USSR, which the U.S. saw as a buffer to Soviet expansion to the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, the United States recognized that Iran was a major player in the Persian Gulf because of its size, population, and location vis a vis the USSR and the Strait of Hormuz.

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Ibid.

Schloesser, p. 1.

George P. Schultz, "Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 27 January 1987," in State Department Special Report No. 166, July 1987.

The Weinberger Report, p. 3.

Yet, the interests of the United States in the Persian Gulf were directly threatened by the policies of Iran. Better relations between the two nations could not occur while Iran pursued the war, sponsored international terrorism and hostage-taking, attempted to subvert smaller Gulf neighbors and spread Iranian expansionism and extremism.<sup>2</sup> The United States had not been able to improve relations with Iran despite the arms-for-hostages-deal. In the face of Iranian intransigence, a "firm but unprovocative" foreign policy on the part of the United States was seen as the means to convince Iran to change its policies.<sup>3</sup> The American administration felt that it was up to Iran to make the necessary moves to improve relations. In the absence of such efforts, the U.S. then decided to take appropriate measures to protect its other interests in the Gulf.

#### Political Interests

The goal of American foreign policy in the Gulf was to promote regional security and stability. The moderate Arab Gulf states, which had formed the GCC for greater collective security, had vast oil reserves. Their wealth

<sup>2</sup>George F. Schultz, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>The Weinberger Report, p. 3.

also gave them tremendous influence beyond the region. It was in the interests of the U.S. to ensure that these countries resist Soviet influence deriving from the invasion of Afghanistan. The threat posed by Iran's continuation of the war and its desire to sweep away "illegitimate regimes" was also of great concern.

The Gulf oil sheikdoms were wealthy, but militarily weak. Iran was clearly a destabilizing regime. In particular, Iran had singled out Kuwait in 1986 for naval attacks on shipping servicing its harbors; had mined its shipping channels; conducted three bombing raids and terrorist attacks on oil facilities; and deployed Silkworm missiles on the Al Faw peninsula captured from Iraq and within missile range of Kuwait.<sup>24</sup> To maintain stability, the U.S. policy was to provide arms and security assistance to meet the legitimate needs of the Gulf states.

The administration made it clear that these weapons would not be a threat to the security of Israel, but would give the Gulf countries confidence and indicate a continuing American commitment. The administration planned sales including Bradley Fighting Vehicles; helicopters and

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<sup>24</sup>Schloesser, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup>Weinberger, pp. 367-368.

<sup>26</sup>The Weinberger Report, p. 4.

electronic countermeasures; Maverick missiles; they also planned to sell replacement M-60 tank upgrade kits and F-15s to Saudi Arabia, and F-16s to Bahrain.<sup>32</sup> Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger stated that Congressional action to bar these sales and transfers, like the previous actions on the Stingers and F-15s for Saudi Arabia, would only enhance ~~the~~ Soviet~~y~~ and Iranian~~y~~ leverage and diminish the United States' credibility as a dependable ally.<sup>33</sup>

#### Economic Interests

U.S. economic interests in the Persian Gulf center around oil. In 1986, the Persian Gulf provided twenty-five percent of the oil in the world (seventeen percent through the Strait of Hormuz); held sixty-three percent of the world's proven reserves as other sources became depleted; and possessed seventy percent of the world's excess production capacity.<sup>34</sup> The United States received fifteen percent of its oil imports from the Gulf, western Europe thirty percent and Japan got sixty percent.<sup>35</sup> However, oil is a fungible commodity with a world market. An

Ibid.

Ibid.

Schlosser, p. 2.

The Weinberger Report, pp. 5-6.

interruption in the supply causes the price to go up for all purchasers.

United States and world demand for oil continues to rise. The purchasing power represented by the gulf oil producers resulted in U.S. sales of over seven billion dollars of primary and manufactured goods in 1986.<sup>4</sup> The potential downside of another oil crisis could include inflation, recession and unemployment. The oil shocks of 1973-74, in which the price quadrupled; and 1978-79, during which the oil price doubled; was on President Reagan's mind when he said:

...I think everyone ...can remember the woeful impact of the Middle East oil crisis of a few years ago-the endless, demoralizing gas lines, the shortages, the rationing, the escalating energy prices and double-digit inflation, and the enormous dislocation that shook our economy to its foundations.

The volatility of oil prices, which can result from a small change in supply or threatened disturbance, can wreak havoc in an economy that is not robust. Simply put, the economies of the developed and developing worlds depend on oil and the Persian Gulf supply is crucial.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>Schloesser, p. 2.

## VII. The Decision to Reflag Kuwaiti Tankers

Towards the end of 1986, Kuwait sought to protect itself from Iranian hegemonic pressure and, in particular, its shipping attacks. Kuwait raised the issue of protection of shipping at the November GCC summit. Kuwait then proceeded to seek help from both superpowers. In December, the Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) requested information on reflagging from the U.S. Coast Guard, and expressed an interest in the process.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, these requests were dealt with on a routine basis. According to the timeline provided by Secretary of Defense Weinberger in his report to Congress, Kuwait did not get a response until mid-January 1987.<sup>2</sup>

A similar request by Kuwait to the Soviet Union had been met with a swift and affirmative reply. In January the United States Embassy in Kuwait was formally asked if reflagged ships would receive the same U.S. Navy protection afforded other United States flag vessels. At this time, the United States also learned of the Soviet offer to either protect reflagged Kuwaiti tankers or charter Soviet tankers

<sup>1</sup> The Weinberger Report, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Table 1.

for their use." While high-level inter-agency discussions were taking place in Washington to formulate policy on the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf, Kuwait was informed of the requirements for reflagging. If these requirements were met, Kuwait could then reflag and protection would be considered. In February, Kuwait was informed the U.S. Navy would protect all United States flagged shipping in accordance with available assets. 4

In February, additional inter-agency meetings on Persian Gulf security issues were held at the White House. In late February, the United States learned that Kuwait had an agreement to reflag five tankers under Soviet protection and desired to reflag another six under the American flag. 4 The KOTC request to reflag six tankers was received on March 2, 1987. The Kuwaiti decision to reflag five tankers with the Soviets was the topic of discussion at yet another inter-agency meeting the next day. The Department of Defense and NSC voted to flag all eleven tankers, but the

"Michael H. Armacost, "Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of June 16, 1987," Hearings before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off, 1988), p. 230.

The Weinberger Report, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

State Department opposed the policy.<sup>1</sup> Secretary of Defense Weinberger personally called President Reagan to convince him of the importance of reflagging all eleven tankers to bolster U.S. credibility with the moderate Gulf states and prevent the Soviets from gaining additional influence in the region.<sup>2</sup>

On March 7, 1987, the United States informed Kuwait that all eleven tankers were being offered U.S. protection. Three days later, Kuwait indicated it would accept the United States offer. Congressional notification followed on March 12.<sup>3</sup> Admiral Crowe, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), made a trip to Kuwait on March 17 to engage in direct discussions with the Emir, Crown Prince, and Foreign Minister on the details of reflagging.

Admiral Crowe, who formerly served as COMIDEASTFOR, had an appreciation for Arab culture and sensitivities. He felt the reflagging was an opportunity for the United States. The policy would put additional pressure on Iran to agree to a ceasefire and end the Iran-Iraq war. It would also increase U.S. credibility with the Arab states, who

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<sup>1</sup>Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting For Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon. (New York: Warner Books, 1990), pp. 396-397.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>The Weinberger Report. Table 1.



felt that the United States had always supported Israel against them, and was unreliable when the going got tough, as in Lebanon or failure to support the Shah in Iran.<sup>50</sup> Finally, reflagging was a chance for the U.S. to establish better relations with Kuwait, which had the longest standing relations with the Soviets of any member of the GCC.<sup>51</sup> At the 17 March meeting, Admiral Crowe expressed United States' concern over the possibility of Kuwait opening supply bases in the Gulf to Soviet ships. The Emir assured him this would not happen.

The Reagan administration continued consultations with Congress in March by providing classified talking points on the plans for reflagging to staffers of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The reaction on Capitol Hill was, for the most part, indifferent. Secretary of Defense Weinberger writes in his memoirs that Congress was usually too busy at this time trying to investigate the Iran-Contra affair to even gather a committee to be briefed on the reflagging policy.<sup>52</sup> Finally on the 30 and 31 of March 1987, Assistant Secretary

RADM Joseph C. Strasser, USN. "Interview" of 18 December 1997.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Caspar W. Weinberger, pp. 399-400.

of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Richard H. Murphy gave closed briefings to members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) and to the subcommittees on Europe and the Middle East and Arms Control, International Security, and Science of the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC).<sup>54</sup>

The United States received formal notification of Kuwait's decision to reflag eleven tankers under the American flag in early April 1987. The U.S. also learned that the Kuwaitis had decided to limit the extent of Soviet involvement to chartering three long haul vessels for a period of one year with the option of renewal.<sup>55</sup> With this notification, the Coast Guard began technical talks with Kuwait on the details of reflagging. With waivers from Secretary Weinberger, the eleven tankers were allowed to be inspected in Kuwait to speed up the process considerably.<sup>56</sup>

Assistant Secretary of State Murphy provided open testimony on the policy of reflagging to the HFAC Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East on 21 April 1987. Assistant Secretary of State Murphy was questioned as to whether it would be wiser to jointly cooperate with the

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The Weinberger Report. Table 1.

Ibid., p.14.

Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace, p. 398.

Soviets in the protection of shipping mission. In reply, Mr. Murphy stated the administration's position that the United States preferred to limit rather than expand the scope of Soviet activity in the Persian Gulf.<sup>57</sup> He was also asked questions relating to the ability of U.S. Navy ships to defend themselves in the Gulf, and about the availability of air cover, particularly Saudi F-15s.<sup>58</sup> In view of later developments, Assistant Secretary of State Murphy had a poignant exchange with Mr. Torricelli, (D) of New Jersey:

MR. TORRICELLI. Are you convinced that American destroyers operating in the Gulf as escorts...are defensible?

MR. MURPHY. Yes, I am convinced of that....But part of the effort, no small part of the effort, that we are making, Congressman, is to ensure that the Iranians do understand the seriousness with which Washington looks at this step-up in at least potential aggression in the Gulf, the Silkworm missile being the most notable recent change.

MR. TORRICELLI. The reason I am raising the question is, it is at least my impression that this is an attempt again to deal with an irrational regime in a rational manner and to have them understand, as any logical person would, the consequences of those actions. But I am not convinced that you can deal with Khomeini that way and am afraid that perhaps these American sailors on these destroyers will be offered as a trip-wire and therefore lost, given the vulnerabilities of the region, from a strike onshore.

MR. MURPHY. That regime has behaved in a very rational manner vis-a-vis the American Navy over the past seven years. They have given a clear berth, kept a clear distance from MIDEASTFOR ships that have been operating, of course, as you know,

"Developments in the Middle East, April 1987," Hearing and Markup before the Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1987), p. 29.

Ibid., pp. 29-30.

since 1949 in the Gulf. They have never tangled or shown any inclination to tangle with our Navy.

In early May, the Coast Guard conducted inspections of the tankers in Kuwait. COMIDEASTFOR held meetings with Kuwait to agree on the details of protection for the convoys. The Soviets began the charter of three vessels to Kuwait. On the 17 of May, 1987, while on routine patrol in the Persian Gulf, well before the commencement of reflagging, the USS STARK was attacked.

With the attack on the USS STARK, the Reagan administration policy of reflagging Kuwaiti tankers came under intense Congressional scrutiny and several attempts were made to overturn the policy. The U.S. foreign policy crisis in the volatile Persian Gulf centered around the reflagging issue. The U.S. was involved in a crisis with Iran over its shipping attacks and threats to intimidate Kuwait, and, by extension, Iran's threats to the free flow of oil out of the Strait of Hormuz. Reflecting the relations of a nuclear power with a non-nuclear power, the United States maintained absolute escalation dominance. However, the unpredictability of the Khomeini regime made the management of this crisis difficult.

Ibid.

The Weinberger Report, Table 1.

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All elements of a crisis had now coalesced. Vital national interests of oil and stability in the Persian Gulf were seen to be threatened by Iran's pretensions to hegemony and the Soviet bid to extend its regional influence. By at least January, non-routine decision-making to reflag Kuwaiti tankers was occurring at the highest levels of the United States government, by the Secretary of Defense and the President, in an effort to convince Iran to end the war and stop threatening U.S. vital interests.

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This formulation of policy was influenced by the perception of time limitations. The U.S. needed to quickly block the Soviets from vastly expanding their role in the Gulf at the expense of the United States. The Kremlin announced in March <sup>1973</sup> their plan to protect Kuwaiti tankers. The United States was surprised by both the Kuwaiti request for shipping protection and the rapid Soviet assent. The Iranian acquisition and successful testing of the Silkworm missile, and the completely unexpected attack on the USS STARK by an Iraqi jet-fighter made clear to the policy decision-makers the risks of military conflict.

### VIII. Crisis Management Theory and the Reflagging Crisis

The examination of crisis theory can be useful in understanding behavior of states during the reflagging crisis. According to Snyder and Diesing, the key to crisis management is to use coercion and accommodation to maximize gains or minimize losses while avoiding war.<sup>11</sup> It was the hope of the United States that through the protection of Kuwaiti shipping, as well as initiatives at the United Nations and Operation Staunch, that Iran could be coerced into abandoning its attempt for hegemony in the Gulf and agree to a ceasefire in the war with Iraq. This would maximize the credibility of U.S. policy with the states of the Gulf. It would also bring stability, which would assure the West of an uninterrupted oil supply and limit Soviet opportunities to make significant inroads in the region.

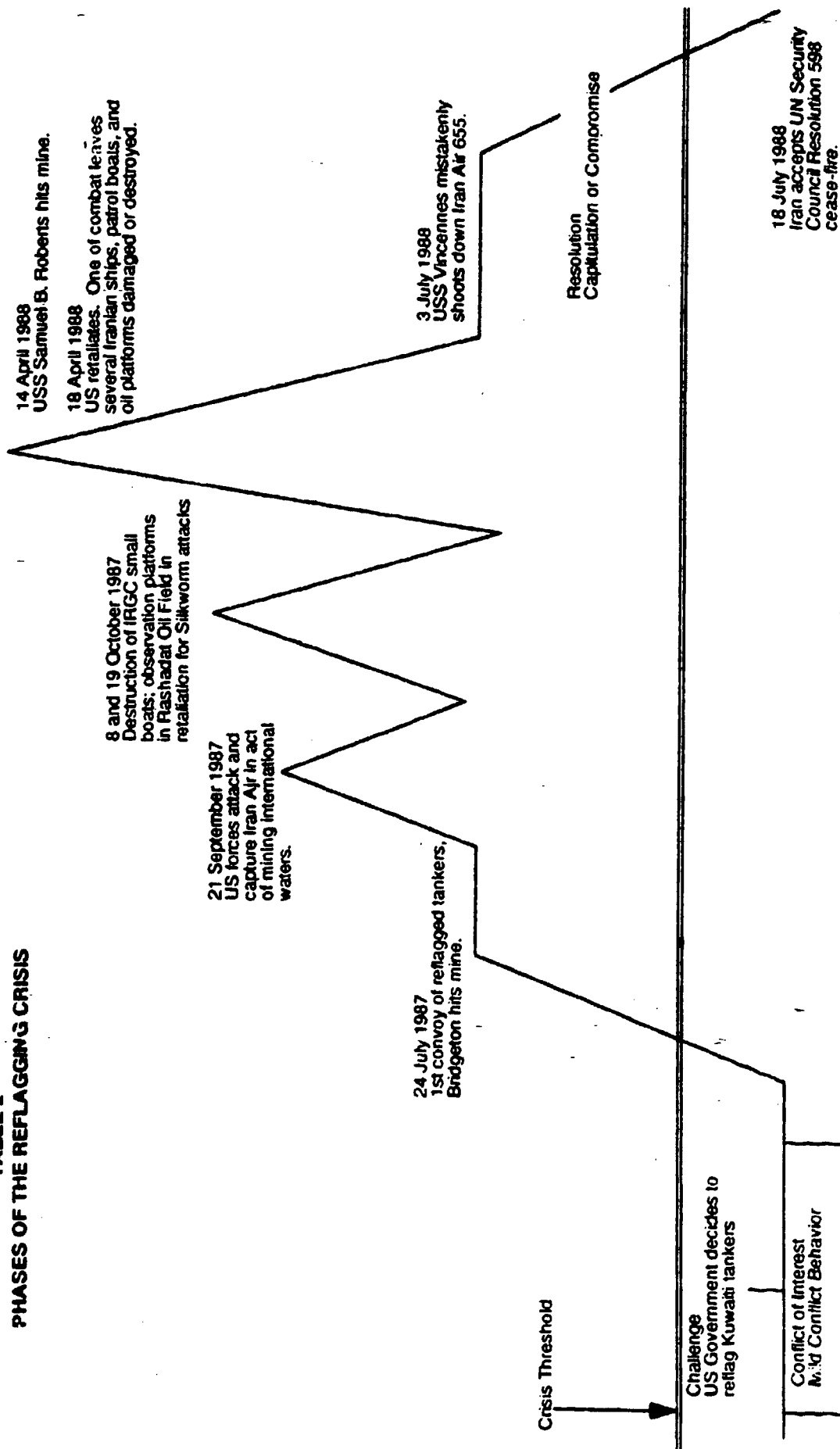
The challenge is a coercive move in which one state starts the crisis by posing the threat of military force to the other. The decision by the United States to escort Kuwaiti tankers with U.S. naval vessels was a direct threat to Iran's ability to pursue its tactics of intimidating

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<sup>11</sup> Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 10.

Ibid., p. 11.

**TABLE 2**  
**PHASES OF THE REFLAGGING CRISIS**



SOURCE: Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, Conflicts Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crisis (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 15.

moderate Arab Gulf states. Iran knew it would not be able to bring the war to a satisfactory conclusion by cutting off GCC states' financial support for Iraq as long as the United States was going to reflag and protect Kuwaiti shipping. The general external precipitant of the crisis which caused the United States to make the challenge was Iran's attempt at destabilizing the Gulf moderates, thereby threatening oil supplies.

The specific precipitant was the possibility of much greater Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf if it were able to assume the role of protector to the Kuwaitis. The attack on the USS STARK brought into sharp detail the hazards of a tanker war that could expand into an open military confrontation between the United States and Iran. The latter was conducting most of its attacks in international waters on shipping of non-belligerents. The internal precipitant to the United States' challenge was the desire of the Reagan administration to shelve the Iran-Contra scandal. It saw the Kuwaiti reflagging as an opportunity to reconstitute a coherent policy in the Persian Gulf that would restore U.S. credibility in the region.

Iran's resistance to the United States' challenge was made by public condemnation of the reflagging policy as a move which would militarize the Gulf and was an example of the American attempt to dominate the region. Iran continued



to conduct shipping attacks, continued its war with Iraq, and continued its efforts to undermine Kuwait. The specific resistance to the U.S. policy of reflagging was to attack Kuwaiti tankers through the non-attributable method of mining.

A confrontation is produced by the interaction of the challenge and resistance, which may last for months and is marked by rising tension.<sup>14</sup> Each side tries to coerce the other while demonstrating resolve through the issuance of warnings, threats, and military deployments to force the other to back down.<sup>15</sup> The intensity of the confrontation will vary as events occur; with each new act, the chance of war appears more likely. The outcome of the crisis will be either war, capitulation by one of the parties, or some form of negotiated compromise, which may be tacit.<sup>16</sup>

The confrontation between Iran and the United States precipitated by reflagging lasted for over a year, from the announcement of the policy in April 1987 until Iran accepted the United Nations Security Council resolution 598 as the basis for a cease-fire to the Iran-Iraq war in July 1988. Tension peaked in July 1987 when the first convoy of

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

reflagged tankers ran into a minefield resulting in damage to the BRIDGETON, the largest tanker in the Kuwaiti fleet. Tension rose again on September 21 when the IRAN AJR was caught redhanded laying mines, then attacked by U.S. forces and captured with mines still onboard.

In October 1987, a number of small boats belonging to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Council (IRGC) fired upon a U.S. helicopter and were sunk by return fire. On the 19th of October, several oil platforms at Rashadat, which had been used by the IRGC to target shipping, were shelled and destroyed by U.S. forces in retaliation for a Silkworm attack the previous day which had damaged the refagged tanker SEA ISLE CITY at the pier of the Kuwaiti terminus. The crisis became quiescent during November and December, resulting in a partial drawdown of United States naval assets stationed in the Gulf.

The crisis flared again in April 1988 when the USS SAMUEL B. ROBERTS FFG-58 struck a mine while on convoy duty. The ship was held together by only one longitudinal beam while the crew performed emergency welding repairs. The United States response was another attack on oil platforms used for targeting shipping. This time Iran chose to militarily contest the United States action and a one-day relee ended with the loss and damage of several ships and patrol boats. The final peak in the crisis was as tragic

and surprising as the attack on the USS STARK, which had initiated the crisis. On July 3, 1988, the Aegis cruiser USS VINCENNES CG-49 shot down an Iranian commercial airliner (Iran Air 655) under the mistaken belief that the ship was under attack from an Iranian F-14. Within three weeks of this unfortunate incident, the crisis was finally resolved by Iran's capitulation in agreeing to a United Nations sponsored cease-fire in the war.

The resolution phase of the crisis was marked by Iran's acceptance of the United Nations' role in finalizing the details of an end to the war with Iraq. There were no formal negotiations with the United States, but Iran ceased its attacks on international shipping in the Persian Gulf. The protection of reflagged Kuwaiti tankers and an enhanced U.S. naval presence continued in the Gulf for a number of months before gradually reducing to something approaching pre-crisis levels. The United States had achieved its goals of preserving the security and stability of Kuwait and the other moderate states of the GCC while assuring the West of unimpeded access to Gulf oil.

The crisis between Iran and the United States was resolved peacefully when Iran realized it was the weaker party. The confrontation, especially the 18 April 1988 debacle, caused Iran to recognize that the true balance of bargaining power lay with the United States. The resolution

was characterized by explicit negotiations under United Nations auspices to end the war and by a cessation of shipping attacks.

The Iranian desire for hegemony in the Persian Gulf - the underlying cause of the crisis with the United States - was not resolved. United States-Iranian relations remained hostile and suspicious, but the costs of the war with Iraq and confronting the United States simultaneously had exhausted Iran's revolutionary fervor and treasury.

Diesing and Snyder cite four categories of aftermath effects: relative power between opponents, a reduction or increase in conflict of interest, emotional effects, and effects on alignment.<sup>20</sup> The relative power between the United States and Iran was demonstrated to be grossly unequal. Beyond the losses of ships and other material suffered by Iran, the United States demonstrated its willingness to commit the preponderance of force necessary to prevail. In addition to the frigates used to escort the reflagged tankers, an Aircraft Carrier and Battleship Battle Group were maintained on-station in the North Arabian Sea, to bring overwhelming force to bear if necessary. The conflict of interest between the United States and Iran was increased as Iran blamed the United States for siding with

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

Iraq and frustrating its aims.

The emotional aftermath of the crisis heightened Iranian hostility towards the United States as Iran felt humiliated by the lack of power to achieve its goals and force the United States from the Gulf. The Ayatollah Khomeini spoke of accepting the ceasefire as more bitter than drinking poison, and Speaker of the Parliament Rafsanjani blamed Iran's decision on the willingness of the United States to exercise its military might on the side of Iraq. The alignment effects were marked by a major restoration of United States credibility and prestige in the Persian Gulf. Iran remained isolated, the Soviet Union did not make significant gains at the expense of the United States, and the members of the GCC were drawn more closely into a de facto security alliance with the United States.

The crisis over the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers between the United States and Iran can be examined by looking at aspects of bargaining theory. Bargaining theory applied to international crisis is understood to contain an element of coercion: that is, the use of military force to cause one's opponent to do what it otherwise would not do.<sup>27</sup> For the threat of the use of force to have its desired effect, the state which is the object of coercion must

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Ibid., pp. 22-23.

perceive that the consequences of force are worse than those of changing its behavior.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, the coerced state has the option of acceding to the demands placed upon it, or resisting in the hope of either a reduction in the demands or their withdrawal.<sup>56</sup> During the period of crisis, this type of coercive bargaining is most prevalent.

During the Persian Gulf crisis, the United States threatened to use force against Iran by deploying naval forces to protect and convoy Kuwaiti tankers singled out by Iran for attack. By reflagging the eleven tankers of the KOTC with the Stars and Stripes and providing armed naval escorts, Iran was presented with a fait accompli. It could either accept the reflagging and cease its attempts to intimidate Kuwaiti shipping or continue its attacks and risk facing the use of American naval power. The decision Iran had to make was whether it would lose more by giving up its shipping attacks, which were central to its strategy to coerce the GCC members into cutting off financial support for Iraq, or continue the attacks in the hope that the U.S. would give up the reflagging policy or avoid using its naval power.

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

Iran was outraged by the U.S. policy of reflagging. It saw the United States as directly siding with their enemy, Iraq, and trying to destroy its revolution by threatening the use of military force to protect those states which were financially supporting the Iraqi war effort. The challenge posed to Iran by the deployment of U.S. naval forces to escort Kuwaiti tankers was an example of redistributive bargaining. A challenge that demands a state give up an activity already undertaken is an attempt to redistribute power and oftens triggers an international crisis. Iran was being asked to give up an ongoing policy it viewed as essential to its efforts to bring the war to an end on its terms. To cease attacks on shipping would mean ceding control of the Persian Gulf to the Americans and giving up its only opportunity to strangle the Iraqi war effort.

In a crisis exemplified by redistributive bargaining, both sides focus on their competing interests rather than those they share. Even so, each side's behavior is restrained by common interest in avoiding war. By 1987, Iran had already fought seven years of a debilitating war with Iraq. Its long-term goal of establishing hegemony in

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Ibid.

Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, p. 24.

Ibid.

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the Persian Gulf could not be achieved by actions which would dramatically raise the presence and credibility of U.S. naval forces.

The United States wanted to promote stability and security in the Persian Gulf and thereby assure a steady supply of reasonably priced oil. A war with Iran was undesirable because it would cause greater instability in the region, thereby disrupting the supply of oil and hurting Western economies. The United States was sensitive to the needs of smaller Gulf states to preserve their viability and not appear as completely dependent on the United States. A recent history of foreign policy failures - including the Iran-Contra scandal, the truck-bombing of ~~Marines~~ <sup>Marines</sup> in Lebanon, the earlier failures of American efforts to influence Iran during the fall of the Shah, the holding of American hostages, and the failed rescue attempt at Desert One - meant the United States did not have an automatic domestic consensus for using force in the Gulf.

Coercive bargaining is normally redistributive because of ~~asymmetries~~ <sup>asymmetries</sup> between the participants which is not present in accommodative bargaining. The challenge is legitimized when it is seen as preventing the opponent from changing the

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Ibid.



status quo.<sup>74</sup> When the challenge is presented as a fait accompli, it can be difficult to change and the resister is faced with the responsibility of initiating violence.<sup>75</sup> The United States portrayed the case of reflagging tankers as an example of asserting the traditional rights of neutrals to freedom of navigation on the high seas. This gave the policy a legitimacy and higher international purpose which was broader than the tenuous legality as to whether the ships met actual requirements for reflagging. Iran was portrayed as an outlaw state preying upon defenseless vessels of non-belligerents on the high seas. While the shipping attacks may have had internal legitimacy to the regime in Iran, it was an indefensible policy in the eyes of the world. By providing Kuwaiti tankers with armed escorts, the U.S. Navy put the burden for initiating hostilities upon Iran.

A crisis is initiated by a challenge which attempts to coerce. Coercion is present in most of the bargaining conducted during the crisis and is normally a highly visible aspect since it involves the threat of use of force.<sup>76</sup> The decision to reflag was in part an effort to coerce Iran into ceasing its shipping attacks. However, once a challenge is

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

accepted, action is required and the policy is not as inexpensive as was hoped for." Iran continued its attacks on Kuwaiti tankers through so-called non-attributable methods of mining. Once it was confirmed that Iran was responsible, rather than the "hidden hand of God", by capturing the troop carrier IRAN AJR in the act of conducting mining operations, the ship was destroyed. The level of violence in the coercion was raised by the subsequent Silkworm attacks on vessels at the Kuwaiti terminal, which was followed by the United States destruction of Iranian oil platforms used to target shipping. When the Iranian Navy sortied to respond to the U.S. destruction of additional oil platforms after the mining of the SAMUEL B. ROBERTS, coercion escalated to open military conflict. After its disastrous one day naval engagement of April 13, 1988, Iran realized it could not match the coercive power of the United States and the crisis began to subside.

The decision to reflag was based in part on the knowledge that Iran had not previously attacked United States flag shipping. This led to deductions about Iran's rationality. As Snyder and Diesing observe, the anger that is stirred up by coercive bargaining may lead to a "semi-

Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 211.

autonomous hostility spiral."<sup>25</sup> There is always the risk that, at some point, the emotions aroused by an opponent's frustration at its inability to counter coercion will provoke it to take hostile actions that are not based on a rational probability of prevailing. Such was the Iranian decision to engage U.S. naval forces in retaliation for the destruction of oil platforms, after the mine damage to SAMUEL B. ROBERTS. Despite the preponderance of United States power on the surface and the air, Iranian naval units attacked and suffered significant losses.

A key to the uniqueness of international crises is the importance each side attaches to attaining its objectives. These objectives are considered important enough "that it is plausible that a war might be fought to gain them or hold them."<sup>26</sup> Clearly, the American administration had spelled out the importance of stability in the Persian Gulf.

In attempting to manage a crisis, it is also necessary to evaluate the importance that your opponent attaches to attaining his objectives. American attempts to expand deterrence to allies in the Middle East "finds that when challengers are motivated primarily by 'vulnerability' rather than by 'opportunity,' when they feel a compelling

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Snyder and Diesing, p. 26.

Ibid. p. 27.

need to redress an intolerable situation, when they estimate that the costs of inaction are greater than the costs of military action, they will go to war even if they consider themselves militarily inferior."<sup>80</sup> From Iran's point of view, its revolution had been attacked by Iraq, which was aided and abetted by the Gulf Arab states and now the United States. It was in Iran's vital interests to defend its revolution by punishing Iraqi aggression.

Iran was determined to assert its role as a regional power at the expense of the United States, which had shown itself to be unable to exert significant influence in the region since the Iranian revolution. For coercive bargaining, or "the power to hurt", to be effective, violence must be expected, according to Schelling.<sup>81</sup> "Violence is most purposive and most successful when it is threatened and not used. Successful threats are those that do not have to be carried out."<sup>82</sup> The Iranian experience in the overthrow of the Shah, and the hostage crisis, including

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<sup>80</sup>Janice Gross Stein, "The Managed and the Managers: Crisis Prevention in the Middle East," in New Issues in International Crisis Management, ed. Gilbert R. Winham (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1988), p. 193.

<sup>81</sup>Thomas C. Schelling, "The Diplomacy of Violence," in The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics, eds. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1988), p. 4.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid. p. 9.

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the failed rescue at Desert One, had shown that America would not effectively use its power to hurt.

The perception of time pressure for decision-making and the importance attached to success can make crisis bargaining appear to take on a life of its own beyond the complete control of the participants. Each side feels "caught in a rush of events that has a dynamic and momentum of its own only marginally subject to control; a false move could lead to disaster." Even though the United States maintained escalation dominance militarily throughout the crisis, there were many rude shocks that caused great difficulty in carrying out the reflagging policy. The attack on the STARK, the mining of the BRIDGETON and later the SAMUEL B. ROBERTS, the Silkworm attack on the SEA ISLE CITY, and the downing of Iran Air 655 by the VINCENNES all raised serious questions and criticism of U.S. policy in the Congress and elsewhere.

The decision-making involved in formulating the reflagging policy was conducted within the Executive branch in a bargaining process involving the Department of Defense, Department of State, and the National Security Council. Congress was subsequently briefed. However, after the attack on the STARK, it decided to take a more prominent

role in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy in the Gulf. Bargaining between states is affected by the perceptions of the intra-governmental bargaining of its opponent.<sup>84</sup> The struggle to direct U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf between the Reagan administration and Congressional opponents resulted in signals which influenced Iran's perceptions as to the willingness of the United States to follow through on its commitments.

The Reagan administration's own representatives testified that less than one percent of oil tankers were being attacked and that the United States received a smaller percentage of its oil from the Persian Gulf than Europe and Japan. This made the alleged threat to United States vital national interests appear both distant and indirect, which according to Brodie makes the question of whether a military response is required more controversial.<sup>85</sup> An awareness of the danger of sending the wrong signals to Iran was partially responsible for the unwillingness ultimately of many in Congress to overturn the administration's policy. Nevertheless, the prolonged debate on the wisdom of reflagging and the attempts to overturn it did send Iran conflicting signals about U.S. resolve.

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<sup>84</sup>Snyder and Diesing, p. 28.

<sup>85</sup>Bernard Brodie, War and Politics. (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1973), p. 356.

Bargaining and decision-making between states is externally affected by the international system structure.<sup>86</sup> During the Gulf crisis, the international system was characterized in its flexibility by multipolarity. The Gulf nations, in particular Kuwait, were weak states which were objects of competition between the United States and the USSR. Iran's preferred option was not to align with either the U.S. or Soviet Union, although both attempted to court her; the U.S. with arms-for-hostages and the Soviets with economic and other high level contacts, despite their role as primary arms supplier to Iraq. While the Reagan administration was motivated by the desire to limit Soviet influence, the U.S. Congress was interested in sharing the burden multilaterally with European allies and Japan. The USSR and the United States both had an interest in limiting the expansion of the Gulf war, as did the Gulf states which sought or approved superpower involvement in hopes of ending the conflict.

The United States expended a great deal of bargaining effort on achieving allied support, which manifested itself in the form of minesweepers and other naval escorts for host nation flag vessels. In addition to providing the Reagan administration cover from Congressional criticism of the United States going it alone, the allied participation also

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

had the effect of increasing Iran's perception of its own international isolation. Iran, meanwhile, had no significant allies in its war effort, it received mostly verbal support from Syria, but was able to continue to purchase arms on the international market from China, among others.

Factors integral to domestic systems which affect bargaining and decision-making include "national style in foreign policy, governmental structures, political party philosophies, bureaucratic roles, the personalities of decision makers, and public opinion."<sup>87</sup> For the United States, an open foreign policy style - with a distribution of power between the Congress and the Executive branch of government, and a significant bureaucratic role in the formulation and execution of policy - allowed a drawnout and hard-fought struggle to be waged for the Kuwaiti reflagging. Domestic political behavior affects the bargaining choices of another state.<sup>88</sup> Iran's perception of Congressional support for, and level of opposition to, the Reagan administration's policy of reflagging influenced its behavior. Iran continued the policy of attacking shipping in the expectation of outlasting the United States, just as earlier, the United States policy was influenced by the

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<sup>87</sup> Snyder and Diesing, p. 31.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 32.



belief in making gestures that would help the "moderates" in Iran gain the upper hand.

This examination has demonstrated the utility of crisis management theory. By using Snyder and Diesing's crisis management model, the Persian Gulf crisis can be mapped out to allow study of its various phases. By reviewing associated decision-making and bargaining theories, light can be shed on the reasons for the particular behavior of the participating states. In this way, theory aids in understanding the Persian Gulf crisis and in anticipating certain outcomes.

## IX. The Role of Force

In the management of crises, military force is used for political purposes. Force is used as a part of escalation, and to control the escalation. Force is a surrogate for war that allows objectives to be achieved and victory gained through dominating escalation. The crucial intangible is the political will to use force and escalate as necessary to gain or maintain goals.

A successful strategy must take into account what the opponents<sup>7</sup> capabilities are. Judging the adversary's intentions<sup>10</sup> are more difficult; in the absence of a universal standard, rationality and values are culturally based. The force design structure must incorporate flexibility to effectively manage the crisis.

For the successful management of a crisis, the adversary must detect and understand signals of intent. Signals are sent verbally with public and private statements. The previously quoted speeches by President Reagan expressed clearly the concern with which the United States viewed developments in the Gulf war. For statements to have credibility, a state must be prepared to back them up. Physical moves reinforce and add additional signals of intent to convince an opponent. The unilateral decision by the Reagan administration to reflag and escort Kuwaiti

tankers was a committal move from which it would have been difficult to back away.

The specific goal of that the reflagging policy sought to achieve was a limited political objective using limited military force. According to Secretary of Defense Weinberger's report to Congress, the mission of U.S. forces assigned to MIDEASTFOR were "providing protection to U.S.-flagged vessels, including the reflagged Kuwaiti vessels sailing within or transiting through the international waters of the Gulf of Oman, Strait of Hormuz, and the Persian Gulf." While the goals of U.S. military force include the ability to defend, deter, defeat, and prevail, the emphasis in the Persian Gulf was intended to be the former two. As Weinberger explained:

The continued presence of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf signals U.S. resolve in the area and acts as a moderating element with regard to the Iran-Iraq war. Further, U.S. forces have acted as a deterrent to ship attacks. U.S. forces have escorted U.S.-flag vessels (4 - 10 ships per month) for the past four years with no attacks on these vessels by either belligerent. Additionally, no other vessel has been attacked while in close proximity of a U.S. combatant.

The perception was that by providing the same sort of protection to eleven Kuwaiti tankers (after reflagging them with the American colors) as was provided to other U.S. flag

The Weinberger Report. p. 1.

Ibid.

shipping, that Iran would be free from further attacks against them. With Iran still pursuing its endless struggle with Iraq, the hope was that it would not also want to challenge the United States.

Many in Congress were reluctant to support the use of even limited military force in the Persian Gulf. Parallels were drawn with Beirut, where the United States had put itself into an untenable and open-ended commitment.<sup>2</sup> The reflagging policy was criticized as hastily put together and ill-conceived.<sup>3</sup> When viewed in context of the eight years of war between Iran and Iraq, it is surprising the United States was able to refrain from direct military involvement as long as it did. During that time, the United States had applied diplomatic pressure through resolutions at the United Nations and economic and military pressure through the freezing of Iranian assets and Operation Staunch to slow the flow of arms.

By early 1987, the United States had applied without success all the political and economic influence it could muster to bring Iran to accept a ceasefire. Through the

Pat Towell, "House Votes to Delay Oil-Tanker 'Reflagging'," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 11 July 1987, p. 1510.

U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, National Security Policy Implications of United States Operations in the Persian Gulf, Report (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1987), pp. 2, 30-31.

Kuwaiti request for protection of shipping, the United States could escalate the pressure on Iran by expanding deterrence to a moderate Arab Gulf state by using limited force. Because Iraq had by 1984 shifted its oil exports to pipelines, Kuwait bore the brunt of Iran's attacks in the tanker war: twenty-six of thirty-five shipping attacks attributed to Iran in the first two years of the tanker war were on vessels sailing to or from Kuwait.<sup>92</sup> Thus, through the physical move of escorting reflagged tankers, the United States was sending a signal to Iran of its aim to further the political goal of limiting and ending the Gulf war. The United States was deploying force as an escalatory option to deter Iran from further aggression against Kuwaiti oil tankers.

The perceived risks must be evaluated against the perceived gains to determine if the deployment of U.S. forces to the Persian Gulf was the best policy. As the STARK attack had shown, there was the very real possibility of damage to ships and the loss of American lives. In its report to Congress, the Reagan administration assessed the overall risk to U.S. forces operating in the Persian Gulf as low-to-moderate. This assessment was based on the degradation of the Iranian military's conventional

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U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, War in the Persian Gulf: The U.S. Takes Sides, Report, (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1987) p. 37.

capabilities during the war with Iraq.<sup>54</sup> It cited the most significant threat as coming from terrorism and other "unconventional, non-attributable" sources.<sup>55</sup> Another attack by Iraqi aircraft with Exocet missiles was considered unlikely after United States and Iraqi forces established identification procedures for use.<sup>56</sup>

U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf faced several potential threats, according to one Congressional report.<sup>57</sup> The Silkworm missile is large (5000 pounds, 20 feet long) and slow (subsonic), however it has the range (over 50 NM) to cross the Strait of Hormuz and the payload (1150-pound warhead) to cause lethal damage to a ship.<sup>58</sup> It is deliverable from mobile launchers that only require twelve hours to set up. If multiple launches were achieved simultaneously, the Silkworm missile could provide a difficult challenge for any ship less capable than an Aegis cruiser.

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<sup>54</sup>The Weinberger Report, pp. 15, 23.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid. p. 16.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

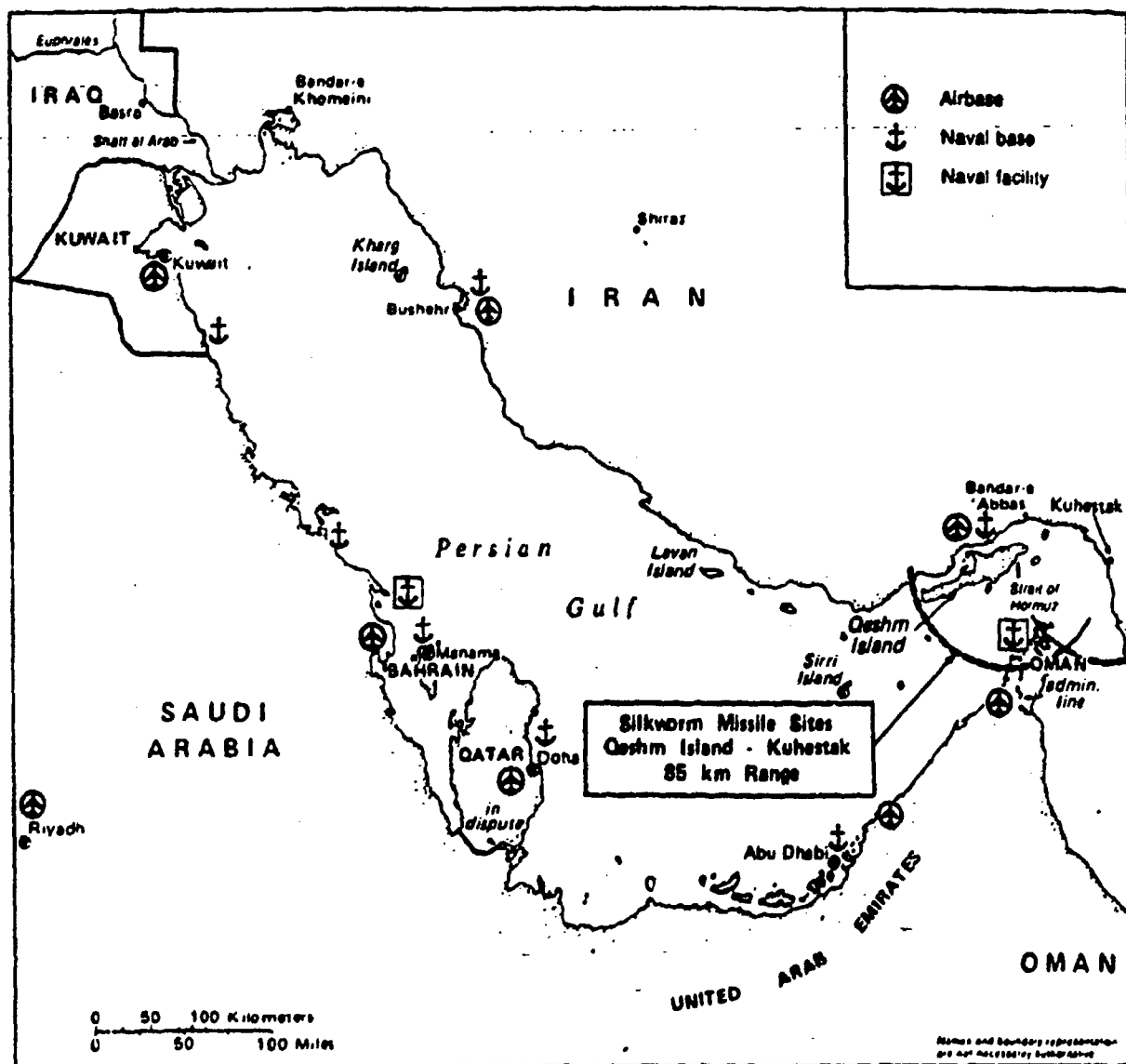
<sup>57</sup>U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Defense Policy Panel and Investigations Subcommittee, National Security Implications of United States Operations in the Persian Gulf, "Report," (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., July 1987), p. 44.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., pp. 44-45.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid. p. 45.

TABLE 3

PERSIAN GULF MAP: SILKWORM SITES



SOURCE: U.S. Dept. of State, "U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf," Special Report No. 166, July 1987, p. 7.

The Iranian Air Force was not seen as a serious threat. It was composed of U.S. supplied F-4, F-5, and F-14 aircraft and operated effectively at only over fifty percent (fifty of eighty) of its prewar frontline numbers, due to the inability to obtain spare parts.<sup>160</sup> Iran did attempt attacks on shipping by firing Maverick missiles from F-4's and AS-11 missiles from helicopters. These anti-tank weapons had little impact on large ships.<sup>161</sup> An Iranian kamikaze aircraft attack conducted by the Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards) was considered a possibility.<sup>162</sup>

Seaborne threats included ships of the regular Iranian Navy, some fifty vessels, including three ex-U.S. Navy destroyers of WWII vintage and about fifteen frigates, of which half were operational. These ships were primarily used to stop and search merchant vessels for contraband, but the Iranians did use them to fire Italian Sea Killer anti-ship missiles on several occasions.<sup>163</sup> More active in the role of anti-shipping attacks were the small fast boats (Boghammers and whaler-type) operated by the Pasdaran who

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<sup>160</sup> Pat Towell, "Nature of the Threat in the Persian Gulf...Defines the Military's Option to Respond," The Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 20 June 1987, p. 1312.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. pp. 45-46.

<sup>162</sup> House Committee on Armed Services Report, p. 45.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.



conducted attacks with machine guns, mortars, rocket propelled grenades from short range with the intent to kill the merchant crewmen.

Finally, although Iran did not possess a submarine force, there was a threat to U.S. ships beneath the seas. Initially, it was supposed that the mines could have been sown earlier in the Iran-Iraq war near the Shatt-al-Arab waterway and subsequently broken loose from their moorings and floated downstream.<sup>10</sup> The discovery of minefields laid in the channel leading to Kuwait's Mina al-Ahmadi oil terminal, in the central gulf off of Bahrain, and at Fujayrah near the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz, confirmed suspicions that Iran was laying new mines in international waters. The discovery and capture of the IRAN AJE (caught red-handed in the act with mines still onboard) confirmed beyond the shadow of a doubt that Iran was actively engaged in minelaying.

After the attack on the STARK, the U.S. decision was made at the highest levels to increase the number and capabilities of naval and military forces to ensure Iran understood the United States maintained escalation dominance. MIDEASTFOR was made up of the command ship USS

Ibid.

Weinberger, Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon, p. 398.

LASALLE and four combatants. They were augmented by four additional combatants to assist in performing the duties of escort, as well as surveillance and patrol.<sup>150</sup> All ships involved in these duties were to have surface-to-air missiles and the Close-in Weapons System for anti-air defense, and LINK 11 which could monitor the air picture provided by AWACS.<sup>151</sup> Like most U.S. Navy combatants, MIDEASTFOR ships also carried Harpoon cruise missiles in an anti-shipping role, naval guns for anti-air and anti-surface defense, electronic detection equipment and radar decoys to detect and counter hostile emitters and missiles.<sup>152</sup>

In the wake of the attack on the STARK, the condition of readiness of naval combatants in the Persian Gulf was enhanced to General Quarters (Condition One) for transiting the Strait of Hormuz or whenever "confronted by an air or surface contact which closes in a threatening manner."<sup>153</sup> The ships in the Gulf already routinely steamed at Condition Three (wartime steaming).<sup>154</sup> Additionally, the normal U.S.

The Weinberger Report, p. 19.

Fat Towell, "Nature of the Threat in the Persian Gulf...Defines Military's Options to Respond," The Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 20 June 1987, p. 1312.

Ibid.

The Weinberger Report, p. 18.

Fat Towell, "Nature of the Threat in the Persian Gulf....," p. 1313.

TABLE 4

READINESS CONDITIONS OF U.S. NAVAL COMBATANTS

U.S. Naval vessels have five readiness conditions. These conditions represent varying states of readiness and are depicted as follows:

CONDITION I. Condition I, or General Quarters, requires the manning of all weapon systems, sensors, damage control, and engineering stations. Engineering systems are configured for maximum flexibility and survivability. With all hands at General Quarters, the ship is prepared to fight at its maximum capability.

CONDITION II. Temporary relaxation of Condition I for rest and meals at battle stations.

CONDITION III. Condition III watches require about one-third of the crew to man the weapons systems for prolonged periods. Conditions III must provide the capability to conduct or repel an urgent attack while the ship is called to General Quarters.

CONDITION IV. Condition IV watches require an adequate number of qualified personnel for the safe and efficient operation of the ship and permit the best economy of personnel assignment to watches. No weapon batteries are manned.

CONDITION V. In port during peacetime, no weapons manned.

SOURCE: -U.S. Dept. of Defense, Report to the Congress on Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf (Weinberger Report), (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 15 June 1987), Table II.

Peacetime Rules of Engagement (ROE), which prescribe the proper responses to threats by military forces, was tailored to more accurately reflect conditions in the Persian Gulf.

The procedures as defined in the Weinberger Report included:

- Hostile intent: The threat of imminent use of force against friendly forces, for instance, any aircraft or surface ship that maneuvers into a position where it could fire a missile, drop a bomb, or use gunfire on a ship is demonstrating evidence of hostile intent. Also, a radar lock-on to a ship from any weapons system fire control radar that can guide missiles or gunfire is demonstrating hostile intent. This includes lock-on by land-based missile systems that use radar.

- Hostile act: A hostile act occurs whenever an aircraft, ship, or land-based weapon system actually launches a missile, shoots a gun, or drops a bomb toward a ship.

U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf will respond as follows:

- Self-defense: U.S. ships or aircraft are authorized to defend themselves against an air or surface threat whenever hostile intent or a hostile act occurs.

- U.S.-flagged commercial vessels: U.S. ships or aircraft may defend U.S.-flagged commercial vessels against air or surface threats whenever hostile intent or a hostile act occurs.

The Persian Gulf Supplemental ROE provided the on-scene military commander with the authority to defend against potential hostile intent or hostile acts. The force used was to be measured and proportional to counter the specific threat. Any use of force beyond this minimum

ibid.

required approval by the National Command Authority.<sup>12</sup> In practice, the ROE was implemented by requiring all U.S. forces to regard inbound unknown contacts as potentially hostile until positively identified. Air and surface contacts approaching within range were requested to identify themselves.<sup>13</sup> Specific identification procedures for Iraqi military aircraft were worked out to prevent another "STARK incident."<sup>14</sup> U.S. Navy and Congressional investigations evaluated the attack on the STARK as the result of improper defensive procedures and not faulty equipment. Admiral Crowe, Chairman, JCS testified that, despite the necessity of carrying out the reflagging mission, "...there are no absolute guarantees that such operation will be casualty free, or that Iran will not escalate the sea war which will present us with further difficult choices."<sup>15</sup>

The enhanced readiness and explicit ROE, as well as the increased numbers and capabilities of forces assigned to the reflagging mission, were designed to limit the options

Ibid.

Pat Towell, "Nature of the Threat in the Persian Gulf..."

The Weinberger Report.

Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., U.S.N., "Statement," U.S. Congress, House, Investigations Subcommittee and the Defense Policy Panel of the Committee on Armed Services, The Policy Implications of U.S. Involvement in the Persian Gulf, Joint Hearings (Washington: S. Govt. Print. Off., 9 and 11 June 1987), p. 21.

of a potential adversary. The range of possible options for Iran to successfully engage U.S. forces was reduced by the diversification of defensive systems and enhanced survivability provided by the new systems and procedures. Of particular concern to many in Congress in the wake of the attack on the STARK was the provision of adequate air cover for U.S. Navy ships in the Persian Gulf.<sup>116</sup> To provide for this eventuality, should it be needed, the protection of shipping plan included maintaining an aircraft carrier battle group (CVBG) on station continuously in the Gulf of Oman and the North Arabian Sea.<sup>117</sup> Because of the difficulties in trying to operate an aircraft carrier in the restricted waters of the Persian Gulf, the CVBG was to remain outside and provide Combat Air Patrol (CAP), air surveillance over shipping near the Strait of Hormuz, and a retaliatory capability if needed.<sup>118</sup> Vital early detection and warning of air threats was provided by U.S. and Saudi Airborne Warning and Control system (AWACS) aircraft flying over Saudi Arabia.<sup>119</sup>

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"Hill Challenges Reagan on Persian Gulf Policy," The Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1987, pp. 252-253.

The Weinberger Report.

U.S. Congress, House, Defense Policy Panel and the Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, National Security Policy Implications of United States Operations in the Persian Gulf, Report, (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., July 1987) p. 33.

Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting For Peace, p. 406.

Other United States military forces were incorporated into Persian Gulf operations as the need for them arose. Battleship battle groups (BBBG), deployed periodically, contained the firepower in Tomahawk cruise missiles and sixteen inch guns to strike Silkworm sites from over the horizon. The BBBG was usually accompanied by an Aegis Cruiser, the Navy's newest and most capable surface combatant.

After the mining of the BRIDGETON revealed a mine clearing deficiency in MIDEASTFOR, this situation was remedied by the dispatch of an amphibious helicopter carrier carrying minesweeping helicopters. More slow to arrive, but ultimately extremely useful to the location and destruction of mine fields, were the U.S. Navy minesweeping boats (MSB) and ships (MSO). Two large barges, provided by Kuwait, were stationed in the northern Gulf as mobile bases for Army attack helos, Marine and Navy special forces (SEALS) operating minesweeping and patrol boats. These barges brought to a virtual halt Iranian small boat and mining activity in the northern Gulf.<sup>12</sup> At the peak of

Defense Policy Panel and Investigations Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee Report, p. 33.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Staff Report, November 1987, pp. 39-40.

Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace, p. 409.

operations, counting both the CVBG and BBBG, approximately 15,000 U.S. military personnel were involved in Persian Gulf operations.<sup>111</sup>

A characteristic of an effective force structure is the force multiplier effect of interoperability with allies. One of the first and most persistent criticisms of the reflagging policy was that the United States was bearing the entire burden, that our allies were getting a free ride, and that the moderate Arab Gulf states were not doing enough in their own defense.<sup>112</sup> NATO allies were reluctant to endorse the U.S. unilateral initiative to reflag, or serve under United States command in the gulf.<sup>113</sup> There was, however, significant and persistent allied presence escorting and protecting their own national flag shipping which resulted in a great deal of cooperation at the operational level.<sup>114</sup>

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U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, Developments in the Middle East, September 1987, Hearing (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., September 1987), p. 58.

Defense Policy Panel and Investigations Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee Report of July 1987, pp. 35, 58-60.

U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Response to the Weinberger Report Concerning the Administration's Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf, (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1987); as contained in Vol. 26 International Legal Materials, September 1987, pp. 1474-1475. Hereafter referred to as the Nunn Report.

U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittees on Arms Control, International Security and Science, and on Europe and the Middle East, U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf, "Hearing," (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print.



In his report to Congress in June, Defense Secretary Weinberger reiterated that the reflagging and protection of U.S. flagged vessels was an American initiative.<sup>127</sup>

Significant help was not requested or expected from our allies. By late summer, this picture of cooperation was changing for the better. As a result of Iranian attacks on Italian and French flag ships, both of those countries joined the British in the providing surface combatants to accompany their ships in the Persian Gulf.<sup>128</sup>

After discovery of Iranian-sown minefields near the Strait of Hormuz and in Gulf international waters, the Europeans sent minesweepers under the auspices of the Western European Union. Nations providing forces for the countermine effort included the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy.<sup>129</sup> Because of Iranian mining and attacks on non-belligerent shipping, U.S. allies were drawn increasingly into the Persian Gulf to protect their own interests. When these interests coincided with American interests there was joint cooperation which

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Off., 15 December 1987), p. 54.

The Weinberger Report, p. 19.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Staff Report, pp. 41-42.

House Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf, "Hearing," 15 December 1987, p. 54.

increased the pressure on Iran to cease its shipping attacks.

A number of countries in the Gulf were providing new levels of support for U.S. forces. The Congressional charge that countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait should do more for their own defense when they had recently been denied U.S. arms sales by Congress represented an interesting volta-face. Even more than the Europeans, a number of Gulf countries were providing important direct assistance in support of the United States reflagging mission.

U.S. Air Force AWACS based in Riyadh provided essential early air warning to U.S. Navy ships in the northern Gulf. Saudi fighters flew cover for the AWACS, and Saudi AWACS provided air coverage of the southern Gulf and Strait of Hormuz during EARNEST WILL convoys.<sup>17</sup> Congressional revelations to the press of this direct but covert Saudi participation in reflagging with the southern AWACS station caused a temporary loss of this asset, but it was later restored.<sup>18</sup> The Saudis also provided port visits for U.S. ships, emergency medical facilities for U.S. personnel, and some early minesweeping assistance before the

<sup>17</sup> Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Staff Report, p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace, pp. 406-411.

arrival of U.S. and European assets.

Other members of the GCC provided assistance based on their capabilities. Bahrain provided port facilities and administrative support facilities, as well as being the "homeport" for MIDEASTFOR flagship LASALLE. Oman leased air facilities for use by Navy P-3 surveillance aircraft, and a logistics base for storage of defense material.<sup>132</sup> Oman and UAE provided commercial refueling for ships and port visits. Kuwait provided two converted tugs which functioned as minesweepers and led the EARNEST WILL convoys, as well as two large floating barges used by U.S. special operations forces. Kuwait also provided free refueling for all U.S. Navy ships escorting reflagged tankers.<sup>133</sup>

Senior U.S. officials claimed that regional states provided additional support, but the Gulf states were reluctant to make public their backing. They had seen the United States cut and run when the going got tough in Iran. They were sensitive to the fact that the United States had never backed an Arab country against another regional power. When urged to be more forthcoming in support for the U.S. reflagging mission, the answer was likely to be that "we must live in the Gulf for a long time."

<sup>132</sup> The Weinberger Report, p. 20.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

An examination of the composite U.S. maritime forces shows that they were particularly well-suited to meet the requirements for managing the crisis in the Persian Gulf. Naval forces were immediately available for deployment near the crisis point. The mobility of naval forces meant that they could be brought to bear at the desired point and at the desired force level. In a region of particular political sensitivity, the flexibility of maritime forces that require no local permanent bases and can remain over the horizon until needed was essential.

The naval forces deployed to the Persian Gulf met the criteria for interoperability with air and naval forces of allies and friendly Arab states. In addition to interoperability with the AWACS, units from NATO countries in the Gulf could receive and provide information via LINK 11. The large U.S. naval force in the Gulf was sustainable. It remained on station for over a year with resupply primarily from logistic support ships from Diego Garcia and other supplies delivered through Bahrain and the Masirah airhead in Oman. The experience of the STARK and SAMUEL B. ROBERTS notwithstanding, the ships of MIDEASTFOR proved their survivability and lethality in combat with air and naval units of Iran. Unlike some of the British ships in the Falklands, both the STARK and SAMUEL B. ROBERTS were saved through superior damage control efforts by their crews

and subsequently overhauled and restored to full operation.

The use of naval forces in the Persian Gulf crisis provided an instrument which was adaptable as the mission changed. Initially, a small presence provided escort protection for U.S. flagged vessels in the Gulf. This presence was augmented as needed by naval forces in the CVBG and BBEG kept outside the Gulf. With this ability to dominate the air and sea, the United States controlled escalation throughout the crisis. Each use of force by Iran against U.S. flagged ships, whether through mining or Silkworm attacks, was met by a proportionally escalated military response to deter further activity.

The protection of shipping mission was structured in such a manner as to reflect the national values and strategic culture of the United States. The naval forces were able to extend deterrence to the shipping of a small moderate Gulf state with the limited use of force while still maintaining its official neutrality in the Iran-Iraq war. The forces used to achieve this limited political objective were appropriate to political realities and sensitivities both in the Gulf and domestically in the U.S. The forces were employed in an affordable manner, as the Reagan administration did not seek supplemental authorizations from Congress to fund their deployment.

The role of force in the Persian Gulf crisis was to deter Iran and defend the reflagged Kuwaiti vessels from further shipping attacks. Iran was prevented from continuing its attacks by aircraft, ships and small boats against the Kuwaiti tankers. When Iran shifted instead to mining and Silkworm missile attacks against vessels no longer under U.S. escort but within Kuwaiti waters, a measured use of force was applied.

Whenever Iran used force, the United States responded with superior force going up the escalatory ladder. When Iran sought to escalate the crisis to combat, the United States used appropriate force to defeat and prevail. While there were numerous reasons for Iran's final acceptance of a United Nations ceasefire, its international isolation and military impotence in the face of superior U.S. military force were necessary factors.

## X. Escalation and Deescalation

Crisis management is, in large measure, the control a state exercises over the escalation and deescalation of the crisis. Crises force to the surface the values, power configurations, perceptions and risks that lie at the core of the international system. As Lebow has observed, "short of war, crises are the most salient and visible points of conflict between states...they are crucial moments in international relations when the purposes and proceedings of states are revealed at their most fundamental level."<sup>122</sup> The expectation of a potential for war is central to international crises.

The goals of crisis management can be seen as three-fold: to maximize potential advantages, minimize adverse consequences, and prevent the crisis from getting out of control and leading to war. To achieve deterrence and prevent war depends on the state's ability to project credibility and stability of its policies. The deterrent effect is based on the adversary's perceptions of the state's estimated capability and estimated intent.<sup>123</sup> To

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<sup>122</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 309.

<sup>123</sup> Kalevi J. Holsti, International Politics: A Framework for Analysis. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), p. 316.

successfully manage the crisis, the state seeks to maintain maximum control and to hold the initiative in escalating the conflict.

The more successful policy in crisis management will seek to maximize the available initiatives. In the escalatory phase, this will involve a combination of threats to use force, with promises of accommodation for compliant behavior. The reflagging policy was a committal move on the part of the Reagan administration. The physical move of deploying naval forces to protect the reflagged Kuwaiti tankers minimized the possibility of yielding for the United States.

The credibility and stability of this committal move was called into question in the aftermath of the STARK attack by the outcry in Congress. Public support is an essential element of national power in a democracy, according to Hans Morgenthau. "A government may have a correct understanding of the requirements of foreign policy...but if it fails in marshaling public opinion behind these policies, its labors will be in vain, and all the other assets of national power of which the nation can boast will not be used to best advantage." While Congress had

Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1978), p. 154.



been briefed on the reflagging policy, the STARK incident brought into focus the Reagan administration's policy.

Many judgments about values and interests in the formulation of deterrence policy are political. Elements within the government may disagree as to whether the commitment meets the criteria of national interest, which means should be used to uphold the commitment, the costs and risks to be accepted to maintain the commitment, what other options should be examined, and how to ensure the policy is signaled in a credible fashion.<sup>17</sup> The debate in Congress over the reflagging policy in the Persian Gulf reflected all these issues.

The debate between the Reagan administration and its supporters in Congress and those opposed to reflagging represented a test for American foreign policy. At issue was whether the United States could formulate and carry out a long-term coherent policy in the Persian Gulf after the failures of President Carter and Irangate. The debate over reflagging reflected a struggle between Congress and the White House for control of foreign policy. The 1970's and 1980's had witnessed efforts by Congress to enter into a full and equal partnership with the Executive in the

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Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 557.

formulation of national security policy.<sup>132</sup> Many in Congress saw opposition to reflagging as a way to prevent another foreign policy disaster like the Beirut bombing or the arms-for-hostages scandal. The Reagan administration was accused of leading the United States into a poorly conceived commitment without sufficient consultation with Congress.

The nature of legislative activity makes it inherently more difficult for Congress to exercise a level of supervision equal to the Executive in the design and conduct of national security policy.<sup>133</sup> More often, it is cast in the adversarial role. Objections to the reflagging policy in Congress included concern over the ability of U.S. forces in the Gulf to defend themselves; the escalatory steps the Reagan administration was prepared to take in the face of an Iranian attack on reflagged vessels; and the lack of burden-sharing arrangements with those allies dependent on oil imports from the Gulf. Additionally, there was great displeasure at the perception that U.S. forces were being committed to significant risk without adequate Congressional

<sup>132</sup> Amos A. Jordan, William J. Taylor, Jr., and Lawrence J. Korb, American National Security: Policy and Process. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 110.

<sup>133</sup> Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., "National Security Decision-Making: Policy Implications," in National Security Policy: The Decision-making Process, eds. Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., and Uri Ra'anan (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1984) pp. 298-300.

consultation.

Congressional opponents to the reflagging policy attempted to invoke the War Powers Act, which would require the President to withdraw military forces sent without Congressional approval within ninety days unless a Congressional authorization is obtained. Each escalation point throughout the crisis produced attempts in Congress to curtail or eliminate the reflagging mission. The "unpredictability of American responses inevitably raises the fundamental question of the compatibility of...Congressional involvement with the requirements of a policy designed to modify and moderate the behavior of adversaries." Nevertheless, the result of continual consultation between the Executive and Congress was an important improvement in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy.

In fact, the role played by Congress during the Persian Gulf crisis was necessary and beneficial. The use of military force over the long-term requires domestic consensus in a democracy. The attempts to invoke the War Powers Act, including a law suit in federal district court filed by 110 members of the House to require the President to comply with its requirements, and the House vote 222-184 (HF 2342) to delay reflagging for three months provided for a full and open debate on the merits of the policy. The

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<sup>1</sup>Jordan, Taylor and Korb, p. 127.

unwillingness of Republicans in the Senate to oppose the President's policy, and the doubtfulness of obtaining a two-thirds majority to override a presidential veto ensured the reflagging proceeded on schedule. The failure of elected representatives to reverse reflagging indicates there was no consensus in Congress or the public to do so. The diversity of the attitudes in Congress ultimately reflected an acceptance of, if not enthusiasm for, reflagging. Dissent had been heard, the policy was carried out, the system worked.<sup>14</sup>

In the escalatory phase of a crisis, a committal move, such as the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers, gives the opponent the option of either yielding to avoid violence or making a circumventive move to achieve its political purposes by inventing another option rather than responding in kind. Rather than try to continue attacks on Kuwaiti tankers by ship, aircraft, or small boat, Iran shifted tactics when confronted with reflagging.

For an in-depth review of the fascinating debate in Congress over the reflagging policy see the Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report's listed in the bibliography; for a concise summary see the Congressional Quarterly Almanac for 1987, pp. 250-264. For detailed examination of congressional objections to the reflagging policy see the Mem. Report, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Staff Report War in the Persian Gulf the U.S. Takes Sides of November 1987, and the House Committee on Armed Services Report of the Defense Policy Panel and the Investigations Subcommittee National Security Implications of United States Operations in the Persian Gulf of July 1987.

The first convoy under U.S. protection began on July 21, 1987. It consisting of the reflagged oil carrier BRIDGETON (at 400,000-tons one of the largest ships in the world) and liquefied petroleum-gas carrier GAS PRINCE. In escort were the guided missile cruiser FOX, the guided missile destroyer KIDD, and the guided missile frigate CROMMELIN.<sup>133</sup> They were joined on July 23 by the guided missile cruiser REEVES. As the convoy passed through the Strait of Hormuz, past prepared Silkworm missile sites, Iranian F-4's from Bandar Abbas flew within fifteen miles but were still in Iranian airspace.<sup>134</sup> The aircraft were warned not to approach any closer, and they did not. On the morning of July 24, when the convoy was about eighteen miles west of Farsi Island, the BRIDGETON hit a mine.<sup>144</sup> None of the crewmen on the BRIDGETON was injured and the convoy completed the voyage to Kuwait. A similar mine could do much more damage to a 4,000-ton ship than a ship one hundred times larger, therefore, the escorts completed the convoy astern of the BRIDGETON; it was a less than auspicious beginning for the convoy escort mission.

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<sup>133</sup>Pat Towell, "Mine Incident in Gulf Stirs New Policy Debate," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 25 July 1987, p. 1669.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid.

No immediate military steps were taken against Iran in retaliation for the mining of the BRIDGETON. No one had been injured and it could not yet be conclusively proven that Iran had deliberately laid the mine that did the damage. The United States did respond on July 29 by deploying eight minesweeping MH-53 helicopters via C-5A cargo planes to Diego Garcia, where they were picked up by the helicopter carrier GUADACANAL enroute to the Persian Gulf. The Sea Stallion helicopters tow long wires which are used to cut the cables of moored mines of the type the BRIDGETON struck.

On September 20, armed helicopters from USS JARRETT FFG-53 - using sophisticated night surveillance equipment - surprised the 213-foot Iranian landing craft, IRAN AJR, as it was laying mines in international waters in the path of the convoys. The helicopters attacked, leaving the IRAN AJP dead in the water, and special forces boarded the vessel capturing prisoners, unlayed mines, and minelaying equipment. After exploitation for intelligence purposes, the IRAN AJR was destroyed, and its crewmembers repatriated.

Pat Towell, "Pentagon Reportedly Beefs Up Role in Gulf," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 1 August 1987, p. 1739.

Pat Towell and Steve Pressman, "Gulf Coup Brings Reagan No Political Payoff," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 26 September 1987, p. 2294.

to Iran through the good offices of Oman.<sup>141</sup> The result of this escalation in the use of armed force enabled the United States to prove beyond doubt that Iran was engaged in laying mines - a hazard to all ships using the Gulf. Based on this incident and other mining incidents, as well as continued shipping attacks, the goal of increased allied participation was achieved. Several European nations decided to supply escorts to their merchant shipping in the Gulf and also dispatched much needed minesweepers.

The increased emphasis put on minesweeping by the United States and allies made the mining option less viable for Iran, especially after the capture of IRAN AJR. On October 8, U.S. special forces helicopters conducting night patrol were fired upon by several IRGC small boat contacts they were investigating. The helicopters returned fire, capturing two whaler type small boats and destroying a 43 foot Boghammer. The battery of a Stinger missile was found in the recovery of the wreckage.<sup>142</sup>

Iran countered the escalation of United States and allied minesweeping and escort of shipping with another circumventing move. This time, it used Silkworm missiles. However, they were not launched at the convoys of reflagged

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<sup>141</sup> Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace, pp. 414-416.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 418.

tankers while transiting the Strait of Hormuz as had been feared. On 15 October, the American owned, Liberian-flagged tanker, SUNGARI, was hit by a Silkworm at the Al Ahmadi sea island oil loading terminal off the coast of Kuwait.<sup>14</sup> The Silkworm had been fired from mobile launchers in the Al Faw peninsula, territory captured from Iraq by Iran. The following day, another Silkworm missile hit the reflagged Kuwaiti tanker, SEA ISLE CITY, while in Kuwaiti territorial waters enroute to the same location. Eighteen crewmembers were injured, including the captain - a U.S. national.<sup>15</sup> While the SEA ISLE CITY was not under escort by the U.S. Navy in Kuwaiti territorial waters, this was the first open attack on a reflagged tanker. Americans had been injured and American property had been damaged. To maintain the credibility of the reflagging policy, the United States decided to use force and ascend the escalation ladder.

The escalatory decision was to use a proportionate and reasonable level of military force to attack Iran's ability to conduct shipping attacks in the Persian Gulf. The targets chosen, after some internal debate, were the Rashadat oil platforms in the Rostam oil field in the

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 419.

<sup>15</sup> Pat Towell, "Senate Warms Up for New Test On Re-flagging in Persian Gulf," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 17 October 1987, p. 2540.



central gulf.<sup>157</sup> Rashadat was no longer used for producing oil, but included a military radar and communications platform used to stage and direct small-boat and helicopter attacks on merchant shipping.<sup>158</sup> On October 19, the destroyers KIDD, HOEL, JOHN YOUNG and LEFTWICH destroyed the platforms with one thousand 5-inch shells, after personnel onboard had been allowed twenty minutes to evacuate. Another platform nearby was boarded and radar and communications equipment destroyed.<sup>159</sup> A reminder of the attack was visible for many months and miles; the "Ayatollah's eternal flame" resulted from the failure of the safety cap of the oil well at Rashadat.<sup>160</sup> A clear signal had been sent that the United States would not tolerate Iranian attacks on U.S. flagged shipping. The rules of engagement for U.S. forces were expanded to allow for the protection of all American owned shipping.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace, pp. 419-420.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Pat Towell, "Senate Shows Its Ambivalence in Votes on Gulf," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review, 24 October 1987, pp. 2595-2598.

<sup>160</sup> Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace, p. 420.

<sup>161</sup> Gary Sick, "The Evolution of U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf," prepared for hearings of the Subcommittee on Economic Stabilization, 14 July 1988 in U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs, U.S. Economic and Energy Security Interests in the Persian Gulf, Hearing (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1988), p. 21.

Nevertheless, Iran continued to attack non-belligerent shipping in the Gulf during the last two months of 1987. A merchant vessel was sunk for the first time by IRGC small boats in December when the NORMAN ATLANTIC was attacked in the Strait of Hormuz with incendiary rounds.<sup>156</sup> Iran's Silkworm attacks on the Kuwaiti oil terminal were rendered largely ineffective by the positioning of radar reflector barges provided by the United States.<sup>157</sup> With the international minesweeping effort now in full operation, nineteen mines were located and neutralized in November alone.

The counterpart to the threat of force in a crisis is the promise of deescalation for behaving in the desired manner. The war in the Gulf was quiescent during the first several months of 1988, while the ground war and the war between the cities flared with Scuds raining on Baghdad and Tehran. During this period Iran had been unwilling or unable to match the level of force to which the United States had escalated in the Persian Gulf. Convoy operations were proceeding routinely and Defense Secretary Carlucci scaled down U.S. forces in the Gulf by withdrawing the BBEG

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Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace, p. 421.

Ibid., p. 420.

Ibid., p. 421.

and the helicopter carrier.<sup>155</sup> By not initiating any actions against U.S. flagged shipping, Iran achieved a reduced U.S. naval presence in the Gulf.

The crisis escalated again when the guided-missile frigate SAMUEL B. ROBERTS FFG-58 struck a mine on April 14, 1988. Having completed escort of the 47th convoy, the ship was proceeding south about 55 NM northeast of Qatar when it sighted three mines floating ahead.<sup>156</sup> As the SAMUEL B. ROBERTS tried to back out of the minefield, she struck a mine. It exploded underneath the engine room, nearly cutting the ship in half and injuring ten crewmen.<sup>157</sup> The keel had been broken and only emergency welding repairs with steel plates and heavy cables across cracks in the hull kept the forward and aft sections of the ship together.<sup>158</sup> The Commander of the Joint Middle East Task Force (CJMETF) concluded the mines had been newly layed - the convoy had just recently passed through the same waters and the other mines when recovered were completely free of marine growth.<sup>159</sup> This act represented an escalation of the crisis by Iran,

Pat Towell, "New Gulf Incident Rekindles an Old Debate," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 23 April 1988, p. 1058.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace, p. 425.

which was now disregarding earlier warnings by the United States not to do any more mining.

The United States responded by maintaining escalation dominance. It used force to deprive Iran of a significant portion of its naval assets. After consultation with Congressional leaders, the Reagan administration decided to attack three oil platforms in the Sirri and Sassan fields that were used to initiate small boat attacks on neutral shipping.<sup>1</sup> It was also decided to destroy the guided missile frigate SABALAN because of the particular viciousness of the attacks its captain conducted on unarmed merchants.<sup>2</sup>

On the morning of 16 April, the oil platforms at Sirri and Sassan were destroyed by U.S. Navy ships using gunfire and explosive charges after their crews had been warned and allowed to evacuate.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the destruction of the oil platform at Rashadat the previous October, Iran this time used military force in response. While the U.S. attack was in progress, IRGC small boats conducted attacks on a U.S. owned oil rig in a UAE oil field, as well as a U.S.

<sup>1</sup>Pat Towell, "New Gulf Incident Rekindles an Old Debate," p. 1056.

<sup>2</sup>Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace, p. 425.

<sup>3</sup>Pat Towell, "New Gulf Incident Kindles an Old Debate," p. 1053.

flagged tug and British tanker.<sup>167</sup> Two U.S. A-6 aircraft flying cover from the aircraft carrier, USS ENTERPRISE, attacked the IRGC small boats, sinking one, damaging two and ending their attack.<sup>168</sup>

Two Iranian Air Force F-4's flew toward the ships at Sirri, but returned to base when the cruiser WAINWRIGHT fired two surface-to-air missiles at them.<sup>169</sup> The 173-foot Iranian missile patrol boat JOSHAN fired a missile at the three U.S. warships at Sirri but missed. In return, it was sunk with harpoon missiles fired from WAINWRIGHT and USS SIMPSON FFG-56 and bombs from A-6 aircraft from ENTERPRISE.<sup>170</sup> Later in the day, the British built SAAM class guided missile frigate SAHAND (same type as SABALAN) fired upon U.S. A-6 aircraft in the vicinity of Bandar Abbas. A-6's and A-7's attacked the ship with missiles and bombs. It was sunk with missiles fired from USS JOSEPH STRAUSS.<sup>171</sup> The SABALAN emerged from port and was severely damaged by bombs from A-6 aircraft after it had fired upon an A-6.<sup>172</sup> At this

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<sup>167</sup>Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace, p. 425.

<sup>168</sup>Pat Towell, "New Gulf Incident Rekindles an Old Debate."

<sup>169</sup>Ibid.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid.

<sup>172</sup>Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace.

point, Secretary of Defense Carlucci, evaluating that Iran had had enough, ordered the A-6 aircraft to break off the engagement.<sup>173</sup> Caspar Weinberger states in his memoirs, "Thus on a single day nearly half the Iranian Navy was destroyed. The other half never emerged to fight."<sup>174</sup> The only U.S. casualties of the day were two Marine pilots lost when their Cobra helicopter crashed in a flight over the gulf.<sup>175</sup>

The Persian Gulf crisis deescalated rapidly at this point. Iran was frustrated in its attempt to find a way to circumvent the U.S. protection of reflagged tankers. Its one-day attempt ~~to~~ <sup>to militarily</sup> challenge the U.S. naval forces had exacted a heavy price. The rules of engagement were again expanded on April 29, now allowing for U.S. forces to extend protection to "friendly, innocent, neutral vessels, flying a nonbelligerent flag, outside declared war exclusion zones, that are not carrying contraband or resisting legitimate visit and search by a Persian Gulf belligerent. The Navy will respond to a request for assistance if...the unit was in the vicinity and its mission

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Pat Towell, "New Gulf Incident Rekindles an Old Debate."

Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace.

Pat Towell, "New Gulf Incident Rekindles an Old Debate."

permitted rendering assistance.<sup>173</sup> By mining international waters and shifting its attacks to vessels of other nationalities, Iran had greatly increased the presence of other navies in the Gulf. Coincidentally at this point, Iraq launched a successful attempt to retake the Al Faw peninsula, eliminating for Iran the option of firing Silkworm missiles into Kuwait.<sup>174</sup> The ground war began to go badly for Iran.

The final use by the United States of military force in the Persian Gulf war was as tragic and accidental as the attack on the STARK, which had precipitated the crisis over reflagging. On 3 July 1988, U.S. naval vessels came under attack by IRGC gunboats when they responded to a distress call from a Pakistani merchant vessel under attack.<sup>175</sup> During this surface engagement, an unidentified aircraft departed from the Iranian joint military/civilian airfield at Bandar Abbas on a course which would take it directly over the USS VINCENNES.<sup>176</sup> Captain Rogers, commanding the VINCENNES, knew

Gary Sick, "The Evolution of U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf," prepared for Hearings of the Subcommittee on Economic Stabilization, 14 July 1987, p. 21.

Caspar W. Weinberger, Fighting for Peace.

"Preliminary Objections," submitted by the United States of America to the International Court of Justice in the Case Concerning the Aerial Incident of 3 July 1988. (Islamic Republic of Iran v. United States of America), 4 March 1991, p. 24.

Ibid., p. 10.

that Iranian F-14s had been moved to Bandar Abbas and had recently flown in the vicinity in which his ship was located.<sup>10</sup>

The unidentified aircraft failed to respond to four warnings to turn away over the civilian International Air Distress frequency and seven warnings over the Military Air Distress frequency.<sup>11</sup> When the aircraft closed to within ten nautical miles of VINCENNES, Captain Rogers, believing it to be an F-14, determined he could no longer ensure the safety of his ship. He ordered two surface-to-air missiles fired, shooting down the aircraft.<sup>12</sup> It was subsequently determined the aircraft was a commercial airliner, Iran Air 655, with 290 passengers onboard.

Iran capitulated by ceasing its policy of attacking non-belligerent shipping in international waters. It conducted no further attacks on any merchant shipping. On July 18, 1988, Iran announced it was willing to accept a United Nations sponsored cease-fire based on the terms of U.N. Security Council Resolution 598. The United States -- gradually scaled down its naval presence in the Gulf to approximately pre-crisis levels. Iran had learned the United States could move up the escalation ladder with

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 11.



greater force and frustrate its policies of intimidation on the Gulf waters. Along with the reverses Iran suffered on the ground in the war with Iraq, the escalation dominance of the United States at sea and in the air caused it to accept peace.

TABLE 5

U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 598 OF 20 JULY 1987

The Security Council,

Reaffirming its resolution 582 (1986),

Deeply concerned that, despite its calls for a cease-fire, the conflict between Iran and Iraq continues unabated, with further heavy loss of human life and material destruction,

Deploring the initiation and continuation of the conflict,

Deploring also the bombing of purely civilian population centres, attacks on neutral shipping or civilian aircraft, the violation of international humanitarian law and other laws of armed conflict, and, in particular, the use of chemical weapons contrary to obligations under the 1925 Geneva Protocol,

Deeply concerned that further escalation and widening of the conflict may take place,

Convinced that a comprehensive, just, honourable and durable settlement should be achieved between Iran and Iraq,

Recalling the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular the obligation of all Member States to settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered,

Determining that there exists a breach of the peace as regards the conflict between Iran and Iraq,

Acting under Articles 39 and 40 of the Charter of the United Nations,

1. Demands that, as a first step towards a negotiated settlement, Iran and Iraq observe an immediate cease-fire, discontinue all military actions on land, at sea and in the air, and withdraw all forces to the internationally recognized boundaries without delay;
2. Requests the Secretary-General to dispatch a team of United Nations Observers to verify, confirm and supervise the cease-fire and withdrawal and further requests the Secretary-General to make the necessary arrangements in consultation with the Parties and to submit a report thereon to the Security Council;

*This should be  
included as  
an appendix  
to paper.*

3. Urges that prisoners-of-war be released and repatriated without delay after cessation of active hostilities in accordance with the Third Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949;

4. Calls upon Iran and Iraq to co-operate with the Secretary-General in implementing this resolution and in mediation efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and honourable settlement, acceptable to both sides, of all outstanding issues, in accordance with the principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations;

5. Calls upon all other States to exercise the utmost restraint and to refrain from any act which may lead to further escalation and widening of the conflict, and thus to facilitate the implementation of the present resolution;

6. Requests the Secretary-General to explore, in consultation with Iran and Iraq, the question of entrusting an impartial body with inquiring into responsibility for the conflict and to report to the Security Council as soon as possible;

7. Recognizes the magnitude of the damage inflicted during the conflict and the need for reconstruction efforts, with appropriate international assistance, once the conflict is ended and, in this regard, requests the Secretary-General to assign a team of experts to study the question of reconstruction and to report to the Security Council;

8. Further requests the Secretary-General to examine, in consultation with Iran and Iraq and with other States of the region, measures to enhance the security and stability of the region;

9. Requests the Secretary-General to keep the Security Council informed on the implementation of this resolution;

10. Decides to meet again as necessary to consider further steps to ensure compliance with this resolution..

SOURCE: U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, War in the Persian Gulf: The U.S. Takes Sides, Staff Report, November 1987 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1987), p. 47

## XI. Conclusion: Evaluation of the Reflagging Policy

The Chinese ideogram for crisis represents both danger and opportunity. Despite the danger, the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers, and their escort by U.S. Navy warships, was seen by Reagan administration decision-makers as an opportunity to regain the initiative for U.S. foreign policy in the Persian Gulf. The successful execution of the reflagging mission was essential in achieving the long-term U.S. goal of restoring stability in the Persian Gulf.

The fear that reflagging would entangle the United States in another Vietnam or Lebanon never materialized. Neither did the limited use of force cause the U.S. to suffer any embarrassing military defeat. Quite simply, Iran did not possess the assets to contest control of the sea and skies with the United States Navy. Iran's strength in ground forces was not a factor in the reflagging, which by definition took place on the waters of the Gulf. The United States maintained complete escalation dominance in this arena.

Proposals that a U.N. or multinational naval force patrol the Gulf were also wide of the mark. Questions of command and control, communications, and rules of

engagement made a formal arrangement infeasible. Only the United States had the AWACS and carrier air power in theater to ensure the credibility of the surface escort force. Additionally, it was in the long-term national interests of the U.S. to maintain the legitimacy of its naval presence in the Gulf. Disingenuous Soviet suggestions that both the superpowers withdraw naval forces from the Gulf to ease the crisis belied the more vital interests of the United States in the region.

Some critics of reflagging were unhappy over a perceived "tilt" toward Iraq. Neither Iran or Iraq deserved support from the point of view of the morality of their regimes. Nevertheless, the goals of the United States were to bring about a cease-fire and maintain the stability of the Gulf states. By 1987, Iran was the belligerent refusing to accept the U.N. proposed cease-fire restoring the status quo ante. Its attacks on non-belligerent shipping in international waters, and efforts to subvert the small Gulf states, raised the very real fear of Iranian hegemony in the Persian Gulf. Eight years of diplomacy had failed to halt the Iran-Iraq War. The escort of reflagged ships successfully added to the pressure on Iran to halt the conflict.

The charge that only a small percent of shipping was affected by Iranian attacks and there was a global oil glut

implies that the United States should have waited for a major disaster before acting. The political stability of oil producing states ultimately determines the stability of prices in a world oil market. The "uncooperative" stance of Gulf states aided by the reflagging policy was partially due to the necessity of those states in maintaining the perception of political independence from the United States. In fact, their cooperation was extensive. That Kuwait asked for outside assistance demonstrated how seriously it viewed the Iranian threat.

The lack of "allied" support in the Gulf was eventually remedied through Iran's actions in continued shipping attacks and mining in international waters. The U.S. decision to reflag was based on consideration of national interests independent of allies. Far from expanding the war, the strong U.S. presence helped limit and end it.

Admirers of American democracy since de Toqueville have expressed doubt over the Republic's ability to carry out a long-term consistent foreign policy. The United States executed the reflagging policy for over a year and a half, until the termination of the Gulf war. Reflagging was crucial in preventing Iran from intimidating the Gulf states and forcing it to accept the U.N. cease-fire. The spread of Soviet influence in the region was restricted. United

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States credibility was restored and enhanced in the Persian Gulf. The groundwork was laid for future military cooperation. It is no accident that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait turned to the United States help after Saddam's August 2 invasion, or that the United States was able to respond quickly in an effective manner.

## TABLE 6 CHRONOLOGY

1979-80	Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, Iranian Revolution and seizure of U.S. hostages
Jan. 1980	Carter Doctrine declares Persian Gulf of vital interest to U.S., military force may be used to defend interests, RDF established.
12 Sept. 1980	Iraq invades Iran after Iranians refuse to withdraw from disputed border areas.
13 Aug. 1981	Iraq declares a "maritime exclusion zone" in northern Gulf and initiates periodic attacks on Iranian shipping and oil refineries. Iran responds in kind.
1983	USCENTCOM established as a force projection capability to deter outside pressure, arms sales to moderate Gulf states.
May 1984	The tanker war escalates after Iraq increases attacks on Iranian shipping and Iran attacks ships going to Arab ports in the Gulf.
Feb. 1986	Iran launches first successful major offensive, seizing the Iraqi port city of Faw.
Summer 1986	Iran intensifies attacks on Kuwaiti shipping in order to pressure Kuwait to cease its support of Iraq.
1 Nov. 1986	Kuwait raises concern about shipping at GCC Summit.
10 Dec. 1986	Kuwait Oil Tanker Co. (KOTC) requests U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) to provide U.S. flagging requirements.
23 Dec. 1986	KOTC informs U.S. Embassy of interest in reflagging.
25 Dec. 1986	USCG informs KOTC of reflagging requirements.
12 Jan. 1987	USCG sends KOTC reflagging information.



1987

13 Jan. 1987      Kuwait asks U.S. Embassy if reflagging Kuwait-owned vessels would receive U.S. Navy protection; U.S. learns Kuwait has similar offer from Soviets.

mid-January      Interagency policy meetings at White House on Iran-Iraq war and Gulf.

23 January      Presidential statement reiterates commitment to free flow of oil through Strait, support for GCC self-defense.

29 January      U.S. Govt. reply to 13 Jan. inquiry reiterates policy commitment to Gulf; Kuwait can reflag/charter if it meets U.S. requirements.

6 February      U.S. affirms to Kuwait that U.S. Navy mission is to protect all U.S. flag ships to degree possible with available assets.

mid-February      Interagency policy-level meetings at White House on Middle East and Gulf issues, specifically including issues of free flow of oil, SILKWORM threat and protection of Kuwaiti tankers.

25 February      Presidential statement reiterates U.S. Govt. commitment to free flow of oil, GCC states' security.

late-February      Successful Iranian test-firing of SILKWORM missile at Qeshm Island.

late-February      U.S. learns of USSR agreement to reflag/protect five Kuwaiti tankers.

1 March      ROTC asks to put six vessels under U.S. flag.

7 March      Kuwait informed of U.S. offer to protect all eleven vessels in question.

13 March      Kuwait indicates it will accept U.S. offer.

17 March      State Department Legislative Affairs notifies Staff Directors of HFAC/SFRC Subcommittees on Europe/Middle East of U.S. offer to Kuwait, offers detailed briefing.

1987

17 March CJCS, Admiral Crowe, reaffirms U.S. offer to Kuwait.

19 March Classified talking points on U.S./Kuwait offer delivered to HFAC/SFRC staffers. The U.S. carrier KITTY HAWK and its accompanying task force moved closer to the Arabian Sea in response to Iran's emplacement of SILKWORM missiles along the Strait of Hormuz.

22 March KOTC/MIDEASTFOR begin talks on protection modalities.

23 March Classified talking points delivered to HASC/SASC staffers.

30 March Assistant Secretary Murphy gives closed joint briefing to HFAC Subcommittees on Europe/Middle East and Arms Control/International Security/Science.

31 March Murphy briefs SFRC members in closed session.

early April U.S. learns Kuwait will charter three long-haul Soviet tankers.

April U.S. Navy increases its presence in the Gulf.

2 April Kuwait gives positive formal response to U.S. offer of 3 March; decides to reflag eleven, limit Soviet role to charter.

21 April- Murphy open testimony to HFAC Subcommittee on Europe/Middle East refers to reflagging arrangement.

22 April KOTC/U.S. Coast Guard talks on technical details of reflagging; first step U.S. inspection.

early May Soviet charters begin.

12 May USCG inspection begins in Kuwait.

15 May Kuwait/MIDEASTFOR meeting on proposed system of protection.

1987

- 14 May DOD authorizes National Defense Waiver allowing vessels one year to comply with certain U.S.-specific safety requirements and two years to comply with drydocking requirements.
- 17 May Attack on USS STARK by Iraqi Mirage F-1 firing two EXOCET missiles. Thirty-seven U.S. Navy sailors are killed, and twenty-one wounded.
- 19 May The Administration announces its intention to reflag eleven Kuwaiti tankers and to send three additional warships to the Gulf. The Administration concedes the reflagging could result in a direct U.S.-Iranian confrontation.
- 21 May The reflagging decision sparks a debate over the War Powers Act and allied participation. Senate votes 91-5 to add to a fiscal 1987 supplemental appropriations bill (HR 1827) an amendment requiring the Administration to inform Congress about security in the Gulf before the U.S. protects Kuwaiti oil tankers.
- 23 May A Kuwaiti freighter carrying U.S. arms was escorted by the U.S. Navy to Bahrain.
- 24 May At a meeting of NATO defense ministers, Secretary of Defense Weinberger expresses hope that U.S. allies will support American policy in the Gulf. The Netherlands is the only NATO ally to respond positively, offering to send ships if Gulf situation worsens.
- 26 May In the face of growing criticism, the Administration postpones reflagging. President Reagan noted that U.S. presence in the Gulf was vital to the freedom of navigation and was essential to preventing further spread of the Iran-Iraq War.
- 1 June The House votes to require the Defense Department to report to Congress within seven days of enactment of the bill on security arrangements in the Gulf.

1987

- 5 June Admiral Crowe, CJCS, declares that the reflagging operation is a low risk operation but that casualties cannot be ruled out. The Speaker of the Iranian Parliament Rafsanjani, threatens to attack Arab bases or ports made available to the United States and to retaliate for U.S. actions against Iran by attacking U.S. targets around the world.
- 7 June The Administration confirms June 5 press reports that it is considering preemptive attacks on Iranian anti-ship SILKWORM missiles if these missiles are deployed.
- 9 June In a Venice meeting, U.S. allies offer no help in protecting Gulf shipping.
- 15 June Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger reported to Congress on military steps taken to protect Kuwaiti reflagged tankers.
- 21 June U.N. Security Council passes resolution demanding cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq War, but a resolution to impose an arms embargo on belligerents unwilling to respect the cease-fire fails.
- 23 June U.S. officials announce that the Saudis have agree "in principal" to use their AWACS aircraft to patrol the southern Gulf region. The Saudis subsequently offered to help search for mines in the Gulf.
- 29 June Senator Nunn proposes a resolution to delay the reflagging plan in order to allow alternatives to the reflagging to be pursued.
- 30 June President Reagan indicates that he will proceed with plans to provide naval escorts for 11 Kuwaiti tankers. Kuwait agrees to provide U.S. naval forces with oil and access for minesweeping helicopters, Oman agrees to provide military access rights.
- 2 July U.S. and Soviet officials meet to discuss a U.S. initiative to end the Iraq-Iran War.

1987

- 7 July In a clarification of a statement by White House Chief of Staff Baker, the Administration announces that U.S. would not withdraw its forces completely from the Gulf and that reductions would only be considered if the war deescalated and the Gulf was safe for commercial shipping.
- 8 July House adopts, 222-184, an amendment to the Coast Guard authorization bill (HR 2342) that would delay for 90 days the reflagging.
- 15 July Senate fails, 54-44, to end a Republican filibuster on an amendment to its omnibus trade bill (S 1420) that would have blocked reflagging for three months. The Senate voted to allow the President to impose a total embargo against Iran if SILKWORM missiles are used or U.S. vessels, personnel, or facilities are attacked in the Persian Gulf. The Senate also passed a measure calling for the President to pursue alternatives to reflagging Kuwaiti vessels.
- 20 July The U.N. Security Council passes a resolution, Res. 598, calling for a cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq War.
- 21 July The reflagging operation commences. The Senate adds to the trade bill by voice vote a non-binding declaration that the President instead should consider leasing U.S.-owned tankers to Kuwait.
- 22 July Three U.S. Navy ships escorting two reflagged Kuwaiti tankers entered the Persian Gulf.
- 24 July A reflagged Kuwaiti tanker, the BRIDGFTON, hit a mine 20 miles west of the Iranian island of Farsi.
- 19 July Secretary Weinberger ordered U.S. Navy minesweepers to the Persian Gulf. The Secretary later said that mines cleared near Kuwait's harbor were Iranian.
- 31 July Iranian pilgrims riot in Mecca, leading to the deaths of over 400 people and heightened tensions in the Gulf area.

1997

- 7 August 115 Members of Congress filed suit in U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia to invoke the War Powers Resolution. The suit claimed that U.S. warships entering the Persian Gulf on July 22 had introduced U.S. Armed Forces into hostilities and asked the Court to order the President to report under the Resolution.
- 10 August An F-14 aircraft from the U.S. carrier CONSTELLATION fired air-to-air missiles at an Iranian F-4 which "was perceived to be threatening" A U.S. F-3 surveillance aircraft. A tanker under charter to the United States hit a mine near Fujayrah, outside the Persian Gulf.
- 11 August the United Kingdom and France announced they would send minesweepers and frigates to the Gulf.
- 26 August The Defense Department announced it would pay "imminent danger" pay to military personnel stationed in the Persian Gulf.
- 11-15 Sept U.N. Secretary General Perez de Cuellar travels to Tehran and Baghdad. He is unsuccessful in urging the Iranians to abide by the U.N. cease-fire resolution.
- 18 September The Senate rejects, 50-41, an amendment to the defense authorization bill (S 1174) that would invoke in the Gulf certain time limits established by the 1973 War Powers Resolution.
- 20 September The Joint Middle East Task Force, established on 21 August, is activated with the mission to protect U.S. flagged ships, provide military presence in the Gulf and northern Arabian Sea and to conduct other operations as directed.
- 21 September U.S. special forces helicopters fired at the Iranian ship, IRAN AJR, after witnessing it laying mines. Navy SEALs boarded the vessel capturing 26 Iranian sailors and finding 10 mines.

1987

- 22 September President Reagan defends U.S. attack on Iranian minelaying ship. SJ Res 194 introduced that would trigger the War Powers Act.
- 23 September President Reagan sent Congress a report on the self-defense actions taken by U.S. forces.
- 8 October Four Iranian patrol boats fire at U.S. patrol helicopters; U.S. forces sink at least one boat.
- 15 October Iran fires SILKWORM missile hitting U.S.-owned, Liberian-flagged tanker SUNGARI in Kuwaiti waters.
- 16 October SEA ISLE CITY, a U.S. flag tanker enroute to Kuwait, is struck by Iranian SILKWORM missile in Kuwaiti waters, injuring 18 crewmen. It is the first direct attack on a reflagged Kuwaiti ship.
- 19 October In retaliation, U.S. naval vessels fire on and destroy Iranian oil platforms in the Rostam oil field. Another platform is boarded and its communications equipment is destroyed.
- 21 October The Senate adopts the Byrd-Warner amendment, 54-44, that would require an Administration report on its Gulf policy and clear the road for subsequent Senate action on a measure relating to the policy.
- 22 October An Iranian SILKWORM missile strikes a Kuwaiti offshore loading terminal for tankers.
- 11 November The Arab League agrees to support U.N. sanctions against Iran if Iran does not agree to a cease-fire.
- 4 December SJ Res 217, calling for an end to reflagging by 20 December, is shelved by voice vote after Senate leaders agree to new procedures that would make it nearly impossible to filibuster legislation to invoke the War Powers Act in 1988.

1987

18 December A federal court dismisses a lawsuit brought by 110 House members trying to force the President to initiate the War Powers procedures.

1988

February U.S. scales back naval presence, leaving 29 ships stationed in the Gulf.

14 April A mine blast off Qatar seriously damages the frigate USS SAMUEL B. ROBERTS. Ten crewmen are wounded. Reagan administration blames Iran for laying new mines.

18 April U.S. forces strike back, attacking two Iranian oil platforms. Two Iranian frigates fire missiles at U.S. aircraft, and an Iranian patrol boat fires on cruiser USS WAINWRIGHT. U.S. forces retaliate; Iranian frigates suffer heavy damage and patrol boat is sunk.

3 July USS VINCENNES shoots down IRAN AIR 655.

18 July Iran accepts U.N. sponsored cease-fire, in accordance with U.N. Security Council Res. 598.

December U.S. ceases escorting of reflagged Kuwaiti tankers: mission complete.

SOURCES: U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, War in the Persian Gulf: The U.S. Takes Sides, Report, (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1987) pp. 44-48.; U.S. Dept. of Defense, Report to the Congress on Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf, (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 15 June 1987), Table 1; Pat Towell, "Senate Shows Its Ambivalence in Votes on Gulf," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Review, 24 October 1987, p. 2497; Pat Towell, "New Incident Rekindles an Old Debate," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 23 April 1988, p. 1057; "The War Powers Act and the Persian Gulf: Pro and Con," Congressional Digest, December 1987, p. 293.



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